



Standard for Commercial and Institutional Cleaning Services (GS-42)

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Edition 2.3

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Foreword

General. The final issued standard was developed in an open and transparent process with stakeholder input that included producers, users, and general interests. Edition 2.3 was issued on July 7, 2015. It replaces Edition 2.2 from May 15, 2015. Corrections and/or clarifications were last made to this standard on July 26, 2024. Information on changes made to this standard can be found on Green Seal's website.¹

The requirements in the standard are based on an assessment of the environmental, health, or social impacts associated with the products, services, or organizations covered in the scope of the standard. These requirements are subject to revision and generally cover aspects above and beyond regulatory compliance. This standard neither modifies nor supersedes laws and regulations. Any conformity assessment to this standard requires compliance with all applicable laws and regulations for the manufacturing and marketing of the products.

Provisions for safety have not been included in this standard since they are supervised by regulatory agencies. Adequate safeguards for personnel and property should be employed for all stages of production and for all tests that involve safety considerations.

Products, services, or organizations that are substantially similar to those covered by this standard in terms of function and life cycle considerations may be evaluated against the intent of the requirements of this standard, accounting for relevant differences between the intended scope of the standard and the actual product, service, or organization to be evaluated.

This standard may not anticipate a feature of the product that may significantly, and undesirably, increase its impact on the environment, health, or society. In such a situation, Green Seal will ordinarily amend a standard to account for the unanticipated environmental, health, or societal impacts.

Normative references (e.g., other standards) in this standard intend to refer to the most recent edition of the normative reference. Test methods may be required for product evaluation. Unless explicitly stated that a specified method is the only acceptable one, the intent of the standard is that an equivalent test method may be accepted, at Green Seal's sole discretion.

Certification to this standard shall be awarded only by Green Seal or, with Green Seal's explicit written permission, by a third-party certification program conducting on-site audits.

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¹ Library of Standards Documents, www.greenseal.org/green-seal-standards/library#section15

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

- dBA.** Decibels
- EPA.** Environmental Protection Agency
- SDS.** Safety Data Sheet
- SOP.** Standard Operating Procedure

Green Seal Standard for Commercial and Institutional Cleaning Services, GS-42

1.0 Scope

This standard establishes environmental and health requirements for commercial and institutional *cleaning services*.

The scope of this standard covers both in-house and external cleaning services and includes all activities typically required to clean indoor areas of commercial, public, and industrial buildings, and areas directly outside building entryways. This standard does not cover residential buildings, or the maintenance of any exterior areas such as parking lots, grounds, or picnic areas. See Appendix 1 for an example of services included in this standard.

The requirements specified in this standard are mandatory for all cleaning services, unless specifically noted or shown to be not applicable or not available. Where criteria conflict with local code or regulations, the latter shall be followed.

Words and phrases described in the standard that appear in *italics* have a corresponding definition located in the definition section of the standard, Annex A.

2.0 Operations

2.1 Building-Specific Cleaning Plans. The *cleaning service* shall have a written cleaning plan for each building,² which describes the following:

- Standard Operating Procedures that address:
 - cleaning and waste collection (Sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.4).
 - handling, tracking, and storage of cleaning products (Sections 2.7.1, 4.4).
 - equipment operation procedures and maintenance (Sections 2.3.3, 2.7.2).
 - waste disposal (Sections 2.4, 2.7.3).
 - communications with management and occupants of the building (Section 3.2).
- Schedules for:
 - routine cleaning operations, detailing the minimum frequency required for each (Section 2.2 and all other areas to be cleaned).
 - activities performed periodically (Section 2.2).
 - equipment maintenance (Section 2.7.2).

Schedules of cleaning operations shall be reviewed at least twice a year and adjusted as needed in response to the changing needs of the building and its occupants

² This written plan is intended to describe how the general procedures are to be implemented at each site. General procedures and site-specific information may be included directly or by reference, and may be combined as best fits the needs of the cleaning service.

- Details that are specific to each building including:
 - contact people, contact information, location of resources and rooms for use by cleaning personnel.
 - vulnerable populations: their location, vulnerability, and measures to be taken (Section 2.5).
 - seasonal changes to the building operations (e.g., school closings).
 - indoor sources of contaminants or pollution.³
 - potentially hazardous materials, fixtures, and infrastructure.⁴
 - areas with special concerns.⁵
 - schedule of cleaning and maintenance operations.
 - general procedures to follow in the event of an accident.

Activities that should be implemented when non-routine events occur (e.g., renovations, construction, new installations, emergencies, malfunctions, etc.).

Cleaning plans shall be reviewed for possible revisions at least once a year.

The cleaning plan shall be made available to all cleaning personnel and *clients*.

2.2 Cleaning Operations. Schedules and procedures shall be established and implemented for routine, periodic, interim, and restorative cleaning operations for floors and carpets.

2.2.1 Floor Maintenance.

2.2.1.1 For routine floor maintenance, the *cleaning service* shall vacuum floors or use mops equipped with reusable heads or equivalent.

Floors shall be cleaned on a predetermined schedule and as needed⁶ to keep them clean.

- Scheduled daily cleaning: heavy traffic areas, including entrances, corridors, break areas, congested areas, main passageways, and primary work or office areas.
- Vacuum or mop as necessary to keep clean: light traffic areas including conference rooms, administrative offices, auditoriums, media centers, limited access areas, and other areas or spaces with limited or periodic use.

2.2.1.2 For periodic and restorative maintenance of floors, the *cleaning service* shall:

- schedule floor stripping and refinishing during periods of minimum occupancy.
- provide reasonable notice to the *client* before non-routine floor maintenance operations. The timing and method of the notice shall be established in consultation with building management.
- ensure that sufficient floor finish exists on the floor surface before performing periodic maintenance, in order to avoid damage to the flooring.

³ Both temporary and permanent sources, e.g., building renovations, indoor plants, and new carpet installations.

⁴ e.g., floors containing asbestos, paint containing lead, or other hazards identified by OSHA.

⁵ e.g., high traffic areas, laboratories, those with inadequate ventilation, poor lighting, or restricted access, and historical structures requiring special accommodations.

⁶ e.g., in the event of spills or heavy use.

- floor restoration chemicals shall not be applied by spraying⁷
- perform restoration⁸ only when needed, rather than on a predetermined schedule.
- use burnishing or buffing equipment capable of capturing the dust generated by the equipment.
- ventilate the area to the outside if possible, both during and after floor stripping, floor scrubbing, or recoating.

2.2.2 Carpet Cleaning and Maintenance.

2.2.2.1 For routine carpet maintenance, the *cleaning service* shall vacuum carpets on a predetermined schedule, and as needed to keep them clean.

- Vacuum daily: heavy traffic areas, including entrances, corridors, break areas, congested areas, main passageways, and primary work or office areas.
- Vacuum to keep clean: light traffic areas including conference rooms, administrative offices, auditoriums, media centers, limited access areas, and other areas or spaces with limited or periodic use.

2.2.2.2 For *interim* and *restorative* cleaning,⁹ the *cleaning service* shall:

- provide reasonable notice to the *client* before *interim* or *restorative* carpet cleaning operations. The timing and method of the notice shall be established in consultation with building management.
- perform carpet extraction only as needed rather than on a regular schedule.
- clean carpets so that they will dry in less than 12 hours.
- schedule carpet extraction during periods of minimum occupancy.

2.2.3 Restrooms.

2.2.3.1 Restroom cleaning shall be conducted from high to low, toward the doorway, with dry cleaning tasks performed before wet cleaning operations.

2.2.3.2 Areas where pathogens can collect and surfaces touched by hands¹⁰ shall be cleaned and *disinfected* daily, and more frequently in the event of high traffic volume or high occupancy levels.

2.2.3.3 Standing moisture shall be removed from floors and bathroom surfaces.

2.2.3.4 Equipment that has been used to clean restrooms,¹¹ except for powered devices, shall not be used to clean any other areas of the building.

2.2.3.5 At least once a day, bathroom trash liners shall be pulled and trash receptacles *disinfected*.

2.2.3.6 Drain traps shall be filled on a predetermined schedule.

⁷ Mop-on or autoscrubber methods may be used.

⁸ Intended to maintain the appearance and integrity of the floor finish.

⁹ when normal cleaning is not sufficient to clean carpets in heavy use areas.

¹⁰ e.g., toilet bowls, urinals, sinks, door knobs, light switches, handles, etc.

¹¹ or equipment that is designated only for cleaning restrooms.

2.2.4 Dining Areas and Break Rooms.

2.2.4.1 Surfaces in food preparation and consumption areas shall be cleaned and *sanitized* at least daily, and more frequently as needed.¹²

2.2.4.2 Surfaces touched by hands¹³ shall be cleaned and *sanitized* daily.

2.2.4.3 Containers used for food waste shall be cleaned and *sanitized* daily. They shall be emptied once per day and when full.

2.2.5 Entryways.

2.2.5.1 Outside entryways shall be cleaned daily.

2.2.5.2 Walk-off matting shall be placed at all building entryways: 6-10 feet of scraper/wiper matting, followed by 6-10 feet of wiper matting.

Exceptions:

Smaller mat sizes may be accepted if the entry space is too small for the required sizes.

If a facility owner/operator does not allow the use of the required matting, the *cleaning service* shall document that they have notified the *client* of the reasons for using matting and how to obtain appropriate matting.

2.2.5.3 Matting shall be vacuumed daily, and as needed to prevent tracking of contaminants into the building.

2.3 Cleaning Techniques.

2.3.1 Disinfection. The *cleaning service* shall:

2.3.1.1 *Disinfect* areas or surfaces where pathogens can collect.¹⁴

2.3.1.2 *Disinfect* using only disinfectants registered or devices regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

2.3.1.3 Follow product label directions for preparing *disinfection* solutions (e.g., dilution rate), and for the appropriate method for *disinfecting* and cleaning the area.¹⁵

2.3.2 Cleaning Cloths and Microfiber Cloths

2.3.2.1 Whenever appropriate,¹⁶ reusable cleaning cloths or microfiber technology shall be used instead of paper products.

¹² e.g., after spills or if dirty.

¹³ e.g., faucet handles, drinking fountains, cafeteria serving lines.

¹⁴ e.g., in restrooms or on door handles, or bathroom faucets.

¹⁵ e.g., dwell time and whether pre-cleaning is required.

¹⁶ e.g., not when dealing with bodily fluids.

2.3.2.2 Within two hours of use, all cleaning towels, cloths, and materials shall be disposed of, rinsed, or placed in a sealed container.

2.3.2.3 Reusable cleaning cloths or microfiber must be cleaned or laundered prior to reuse.

2.3.3 Powered Equipment: Operations.¹⁷

2.3.3.1 The *cleaning service* shall establish procedures for the use of powered equipment in order to clean effectively with minimum environmental impact.

2.3.3.2 Vacuum bags or canisters shall be:

- inspected at least every two hours.
- Replaced or emptied when half full or when indicated by a bag sensor.

2.3.3.3 Precautions shall be taken to limit worker exposure to dust and particulate matter from vacuum cleaners when cleaning and replacing bags and filters.

2.3.3.4 Propane-powered equipment may not be used indoors when the building is occupied.¹⁸ The maximum air circulation and exchange shall be provided.

2.4 Collection of Waste and Recyclable Items

2.4.1 Waste/Trash Collection.¹⁹ For waste containers not addressed elsewhere in the standard, the *cleaning service* shall:

2.4.1.1 Remove trash and replace liners only when they are soiled from wet trash or food, become broken, or as required by the *client*.

2.4.1.2 Dispose of all trash before weekends and holidays.

2.4.2 Recycling. Where a recycling program exists, *cleaning services* shall:

2.4.2.1 Inspect recycling areas daily, including collection bins, and clean them if they are dirty.

2.4.2.2 Collect soda and other beverage containers weekly or more frequently as required.

2.4.2.3 Ensure that the recycling stations are marked clearly.

2.4.2.4 Collect recyclable materials that have come in contact with food²⁰ and remove from the building before weekends and holidays.

2.4.2.5 Determine, together with the *client*:

- procedures for rinsing and separation of recyclables.
- locations and procedures for collecting recyclables.
- how to ensure that recycling stations are accessible.

¹⁷ Section 2.7.2 describes requirements for maintenance of powered equipment.

¹⁸ Local and state ordinances may restrict the use of propane-powered equipment indoors.

¹⁹ Waste containers in restrooms are addressed in Section 2.2.3 and those in food areas are addressed in Section 2.2.4.

²⁰ e.g., soda cans.

2.4.2.6 Periodically review with the *client* the status of the recycling program, including effectiveness and any problems regarding separation or collection of recyclable materials.

2.5 Vulnerable Populations. The *cleaning service* shall obtain from the building management a list of areas with *vulnerable populations*.

In situations where cleaning operations have the potential to adversely affect any identified members of a *vulnerable population*, the *cleaning service* shall document their presence at each building and:

2.5.1 Schedule daily cleaning activities to prevent exposure of *vulnerable populations* to the cleaning process.

2.5.2 Adopt alternative cleaning practices that minimize or eliminate use of products listed in Section 4.1.

2.5.3 Cleaning products (Section 4.1) shall be used only in areas where the ventilation will dissipate them before the area becomes repopulated.²¹

2.5.4 Prevent the transfer of cleaning products and other impacts to areas of the building where *vulnerable populations* may be present.

2.6 Indoor Plants. *Cleaning services* that are responsible for maintenance of indoor plants shall:

- ensure that plants are not in direct contact with carpet.
- move plants away from heating, ventilating, and air conditioning vents.

Cleaning services that are not responsible for plant care shall inform the *client* if these requirements are not met or if plants interfere with cleaning (Section 3.2).

2.7 Back-Of-House Procedures.

2.7.1 Handling and Storage of Cleaning Products

2.7.1.1 Concentrated cleaning products shall be diluted using *dilution control* that limits worker exposure. Easily understood directions²² for the dilution of cleaning products shall be provided to cleaning staff.

2.7.1.2 Cleaning products shall be applied using the appropriate technology²³ in a manner that prevents overuse and waste of the product.

2.7.1.3 Directions shall be provided for the proper rinsing and disposal of leftover cleaning products and empty containers.

2.7.1.4 Storage of Cleaning Products. The *cleaning service* shall establish locations for the storage of cleaning products within the facility, and establish requirements for proper ventilation, adequate security, safety, and proper management of the area.

²¹ Ensure sufficient ventilation. Blowers may be used to increase ventilation, if necessary.

²² e.g., in appropriate written languages or graphic representation.

²³ e.g., coarse spray bottles, automatic chemical dispensers on powered equipment, etc.

2.7.2 Powered Equipment: Maintenance²⁴

2.7.2.1 General Powered Equipment Maintenance. The *cleaning service* shall:

- Ensure that the equipment functions properly or is tagged out of service.
- Use equipment for its full service life.
- Develop a plan for the phase-out of equipment that does not meet the specifications in Section 4.2.
- Establish a quarterly maintenance program to inspect and maintain all equipment, according to manufacturer recommendations. A maintenance log shall be maintained.

2.7.2.2 Vacuum Cleaner Maintenance.

2.7.2.2.1 Vacuum cleaners shall be equipped with the proper filter or bag; the filters shall be changed or cleaned according to manufacturer recommendations.

2.7.2.3.2 Precautions shall be taken to limit worker exposure to dust and particulate matter when cleaning and replacing bags and filters.

2.7.3 Waste Disposal.

2.7.3.1 All waste items that are accepted for recycling in the community²⁵ shall be stored in separate containers and recycled.

2.7.3.2 Trash shall be disposed of outside in covered containers away from the immediate exterior of the building.

3.0 Communication

3.1 Internal Communications. The cleaning service shall establish procedures for cleaning service employees to provide comments and suggestions about workplace issues and suggestions for improvements.

3.2 Communications with the Client. The *cleaning service* shall:

3.2.1 Establish with the *client* procedures for cleaning personnel to communicate with building management and occupants, and for building management and occupants to provide feedback. The following issues shall be addressed:

- coordination with pest control.
- construction and building improvements.
- other services.

²⁴ Section 2.3.3 describes requirements for operations of powered equipment.

²⁵ e.g., paper, glass, plastics, cardboard, other packaging materials, empty chemical containers, and worn equipment.

3.2.2 Inform building management about the presence of pests, any maintenance issues, and any situations that interfere with cleaning or recycling operations.²⁶

3.2.3 Request that the *clients* identify *vulnerable populations* in the building and establish a process to meet the requirements in Section 2.5.

3.2.4 Identify an employee who is available to the *client* as a contact person for information and comment.

3.2.5 Provide building management with:

- a list of all cleaning products used in the building.
- the name, address, and phone number of the contact persons for the *cleaning service* and the *client*.
- a statement that the *cleaning service* maintains the product labels and Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) of each product used in the building.
- a statement that the labels or SDSs are available for review upon request.
- materials that explain how building occupants can reduce the need for more intensive cleaning processes or treatments.²⁷

4.0 Purchasing

4.1 Environmentally Preferable Cleaning Products and Supplies.

4.1.1 For the following categories of cleaning products and supplies, the *cleaning service* shall use only *environmentally preferable products*:

- general-purpose cleaners, floor cleaners, bathroom cleaners, glass cleaners, and carpet cleaners.
- floor finishes and floor strippers.
- liquid hand soap and foam hand soap.
- toilet tissue and facial tissue.
- paper towels and napkins.

4.1.2 Plastic liners for trash and recycling cans shall contain a minimum of 10% post-consumer recycled content or have a thickness of less than 0.7 mils. Exemptions may be granted where necessary for the operation of the facility.²⁸

4.2 Powered Cleaning Equipment. Purchased or powered janitorial equipment²⁹ shall meet the following requirements:

²⁶ e.g., plants on heaters or floor, restrictions on trash/recycle bin access, unmarked recycling stations

²⁷ e.g., reporting spills and making attempts to reduce clutter in personal spaces

²⁸ e.g., compostable food-waste bags for composting, or airline regulations for thicker transparent bags.

²⁹ e.g., powered floor scrubbers, burnishers, steam extractors, vacuum cleaners, power washers, and other powered cleaning equipment.

- Vacuum cleaners shall meet the requirements of the Carpet and Rug Institute Seal of Approval/Green Label vacuum program and shall operate at a sound level below 70 decibels (dBA).
- Carpet extraction equipment must meet the requirements of the Carpet and Rug Institute Bronze Seal of Approval.
- Powered floor maintenance equipment shall capture particles and shall operate at a sound level below 70 dBA.
- Propane-powered floor equipment shall have low-emission engines certified by the California Air Resources Board under the Small Off-Road Engines or Equipment program, and shall be equipped with catalytic and exhaust monitoring.
- Powered scrubbing machines shall be capable of variable rate dispensing.

4.3 Minimizing Package Waste. *Cleaning services* shall purchase cleaning products and supplies in quantities that minimize the amount of waste generated from empty packaging and containers.

4.4 Recordkeeping. Purchases of cleaning products shall be tracked at least quarterly.

5.0 Training

Training shall be matched to the needs of each employee.³⁰

5.1 Initial Training. Upon hiring, all cleaning personnel shall receive at least 12 hours of training³¹ on:

- the safe and effective handling and use of all cleaning products.
- cleaning procedures.
- use and maintenance of cleaning equipment.
- all procedures needed to conform to this standard.

Procurement staff shall be trained in the selection of environmentally preferable cleaning materials (Section 4.1).

New hires shall complete an additional 12 hours of training before the end of the first year of hire.

5.2 Safety Training. As part of initial training, all personnel shall be given standard safety training³² on:

- reducing and preventing ergonomic injuries.
- exposure to hazardous materials encountered by personnel of *Cleaning Service*.
- proper use of personal protective equipment.
- proper rinsing and disposal of leftover cleaning products or their empty containers.

5.3 Site-Specific Training. As part of initial training, site-specific training shall be provided to all cleaning personnel, focusing on procedures for the facility to which they will be assigned, and covering:

³⁰ e.g., limited English proficiency, physical challenges, or learning disabilities.

³¹ This training may occur before personnel are assigned to a facility or it may be conducted at the site, before beginning independent work.

³² Training required by OSHA may include Right to Know, Hazard Communication, and Bloodborne Pathogens.

- facility-specific cleaning plan.
- measures for protection of *vulnerable populations*.
- how to communicate with the *client* if hazardous events occur.

5.4 Continuing Training. All employees³³ who are not in their first year of employment³⁴ shall receive 24 hours of training on an annual basis. This training shall include in-service training, continuing education, and/or professional development, to maintain knowledge of correct procedures for safety, cleaning products, equipment, techniques, and relevant environmental standards.

5.5 Records Of Training. Records shall be maintained on each employee for all training required by this standard.

5.5.1 The documentation shall include:

- the topics included in the training.
- a general outline of information covered.
- the name and qualifications of the trainer.
- the date(s) and duration of the training or courses.

5.5.2 Records shall be retained:

- For current employees, two years from each training occurrence.
- For former employees, for one year after departure.

6.0 Trademark Use Requirements

6.1 Trademark Use. Any use of the Green Seal® Certification Mark or the Green Seal name, e.g., on the property of the certified service or promotional materials, must be in accordance with Green Seal's Trademark Use Guidelines.³⁵

6.2 Misleading Claims. Green Seal trademarks shall not be used in conjunction with any modifying terms, phrases, or graphic images that might mislead consumers as to the extent or nature of the certification.

³³ Including contractor management/supervisors.

³⁴ New hires are required by section 5.1.

³⁵ www.greenseal.org/trademark-use-guidelines

Annex A – Definitions (Normative)

Note that the defined terms are italicized throughout the standard.

The definitions listed here may differ from those of other, established, Green Seal standards; where a specific Green Seal standard is not referenced, these definitions apply.

Cleaning service. An organization or service within an organization that provides cleaning services to commercial or institutional building owners and operators, including both in-house and external providers.

Client. The property that has contracted or retained the *cleaning service* and individuals that may need to be contacted, including building owners, facility managers, and building occupants, as relevant.

Concentrate. A product that must be substantially diluted with water to form the appropriate solution for use (typically at least 1:16).

Dilution Control. A procedure that controls the proper dilution of a *concentrated* product while limiting worker exposure. Examples include tablets, dissolvable film pods, closed dilution systems, and pre-measured pouches.

Disinfect. Destroying infectious microorganisms present on hard surfaces.

Environmentally Preferable Product. A product certified as such by a Type 1 (i.e., third-party) environmental label that was developed in accordance with the ISO 14024 Environmental Labeling Standard. Alternatively, a product may be designated as environmentally preferable by an established and legitimate, nationally recognized program developed with the purpose of identifying environmentally preferable products. The program must not have any financial interest or stake in sales of the product, or other conflict of interest. Such designation must be based on consideration of human health and safety, ecological toxicity, other environmental impacts, and resource conservation, as appropriate, for the product and its packaging, on a life cycle basis. Product criteria must distinguish market leadership for that product category, and be publicly available and transparent.

Interim Carpet Cleaning. Used to maintain carpets uniform appearance on a non-regular basis.

Restorative Carpet Cleaning. Used when accumulated soils and cleaning residues need to be extracted to return the carpet to a relatively clean (free of unwanted matter) condition or when interim cleaning systems are not achieving desired results.

Sanitize. Reducing microorganisms to levels specified by public health codes or regulations.

Vulnerable Population. Occupants, customers, or employees who are more susceptible than the general population to health risks that may be posed by cleaning operations. Examples of such populations include children, pregnant women, asthmatics, the elderly and infirm, and people with chemical sensitivities (e.g., to fragrances).

Appendix 1 – Scope (Informative)

Examples of products included in or excluded from the scope of GS-42:

Services Included in GS-42

- Cleaning services for commercial or institutional buildings.
- Cleaning services for hotels, assisted living, hospitals, and similar properties where the residential areas and common/public space are typically cleaned by in-house or contract service providers (i.e., the individual residents are not responsible for the cleaning of the residential areas).
- Cleaning services for common or public areas in dormitories, apartments, and similar properties.

Services Excluded from GS-42

- Services that clean residential properties or areas.
- Specialty cleaning services focusing on only one aspect of cleaning or special cleaning needs, such as deep/restorative carpet cleaning, window washing, upholstery cleaning, or mold remediation services.