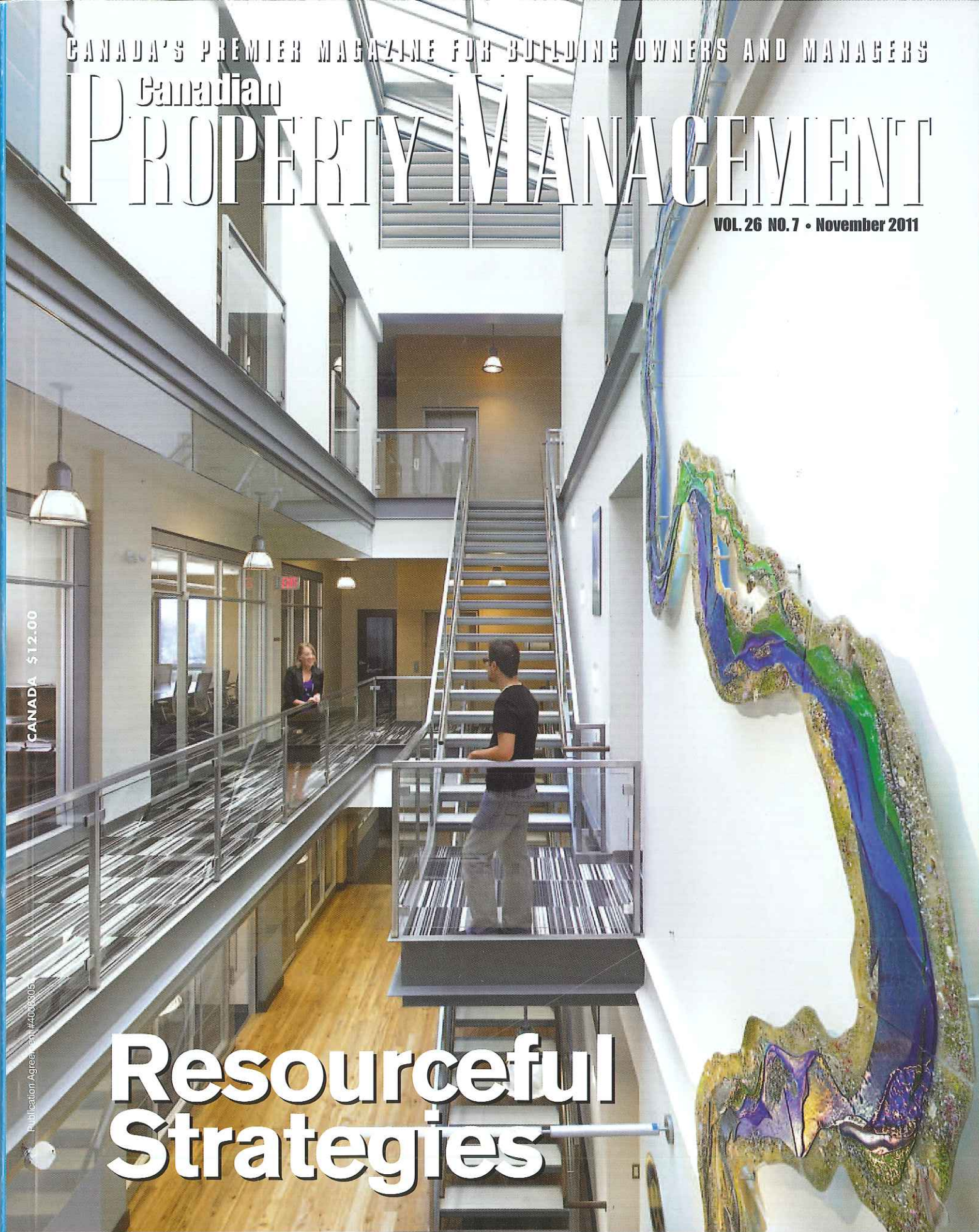


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# Canadian PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

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## Resourceful Strategies

**GREEN & BROWN MARKET DRIVERS LEED PLATINUM x 3 ASBESTOS COMPENSATION  
LEGIONELLA HAZARDS CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSE WATER COSTS & CONSERVATION**



# CHEMICAL CAUTIONS FOR FLOOR CARE

## MSDS Awareness Crucial for Safe Cleaning

By Paul Goldin

**CONSTANT FOOT TRAFFIC** carries an accumulation of dirt, pollutants and allergens into the indoor environment. New trends in sustainable cleaning are introducing health and cost benefits to a counterbalancing solution.

Admittedly, the first wave of green cleaners, finishes and strippers entering the market weren't particularly effective, but were generally costlier than conventional products. Some companies also made unproven claims about products' green status, which created further skepticism. At the same time, however, growing concern about the hazardous chemical content of cleaning products fueled demand for healthier alternatives.

This has brought improvements in technology and product formulations, much to the benefit of the health of maintenance staff and building occupants.

Rising demand has also helped drive costs down, making environmentally preferable floor care products price-competitive.

The World Health Organization estimates suggest that one-third of buildings today can be considered sick, while 60% of buildings in the United States have serious or somewhat serious problems with indoor air quality (IAQ). Chemicals found in conventional cleaning products, from volatile organic compounds (VOCs) to asthmagens, such as ammonia, formaldehyde and phthalates, contribute to the health risks in indoor environments.

A study from Air Quality Sciences, a leader in indoor air quality testing, reports there can be 100 to 1,000 VOCs present in indoor environments. These can cause eye, nose and throat irritation; cough; headache; general flu-like illnesses; skin irritation; and some are linked to cancer.

Exposure to heavy-duty cleaners and floor care products containing these substances may result in dizziness, loss of concentration, fatigue, wheezing, coughing, asthma attacks, respiratory infections and hypersensitivity pneumonitis. However, undue exposure can be avoided.

Building managers and janitorial supervisors must stress the importance of, and train staff in, reading MSDS (material safety datasheet) instructions. An MSDS provides instructions for: proper handling and storage of products; how to protect from exposure; and other safety measures for personal protection.

Traditional floor finishes typically contain polymers with heavy metals, such as zinc, that can make their way into the waterways and become harmful to aquatic life. Building and maintenance managers should take the time to read and understand what the

symbols and classifications mean, and whether a product can pose an environmental and/or human health hazard.

**CERTIFIED PRODUCT OPTIONS**

Cleaning products with environmental certifications are also now readily available to provide other options for improved IAQ. Chemicals certified by a third party help eliminate the guesswork for those looking for products that meet green and health requirements. Products certified by a reputable environmental certification program also lend credibility to a sustainable floor care program.

Such eco-labels for cleaning chemicals include:

- **The EcoLogo Program:** one of North America's most trusted and recognizable eco-labels, EcoLogo offers third-party certification of many different products including cleaning and sanitary paper products. EcoLogo is widely known as a mark of environmental leadership, which looks at multiple environmental attributes across the life of a product.
- **Green Seal:** this U.S.-based non-profit eco-labelling organization uses science-based programs to inform consumers, purchasers and companies, and help them to identify greener products such as cleaning chemicals. This eco-label is also multi-attribute and lifecycle-based.
- **Design for the Environment (DfE):** helps commercial purchasers and consumers find cleaning products with safer ingredients. Manufacturers that meet stringent criteria for human and environmental health can put the DfE certification symbol on their household and commercial products such as cleaners and detergents.

**OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES**

Training helps support successful adoption of a sustainable floor care program. This also recognizes the economics of floor care maintenance and pressure to reduce costs, sometimes by reducing the frequency of cleaning tasks.


Trained staff will better grasp how to use the cleaning products and equipment in the most appropriate way to achieve the best results. Some suppliers and manufacturers also offer on-site demonstrations of products and equipment, training and customer service to help building managers maintain healthier indoor environments.

Sustainable floor care practices can also contribute to achieving LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance certification. Points can be secured with the purchase of environmentally preferable cleaners certified by EcoLogo and/or Green Seal, while an effective green cleaning program can also reduce water consumption and can directly support sustainability efforts by reducing energy consumption and improving indoor air quality.

Meanwhile, cleaning chemical manufacturers continue to innovate and make scientific improvements to their formulas. Notably, even finishes and strippers, which were traditionally perceived to be some of the most toxic floor care products, are being transformed.

Demand from building owners/managers and occupants will no doubt continue to drive these advancements. ■■

Paul Goldin is Chief Sustainability Officer at Avmor, a manufacturer of professional cleaning products for the food service and janitorial markets. For more information, see the website at [www.avmor.com](http://www.avmor.com).




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