

Sustainable cleaning and soft facilities management; a holistic cycle

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Chris Horgan, director of cleaning and soft facilities management company [Nanogreen](#), explains why sustainability is about people as well as products and processes.

In the face of the climate crisis, businesses across the supply chain are beginning to consider their own environmental impact. Commercial cleaning and facilities management providers are no exception; driven partly by growing customer demand for more sustainable services, many have already made the switch to non-chemical cleaning agents, or taken steps to minimise their carbon footprint.

But, at Nanogreen, we believe that sustainability involves more than just green products and energy-saving initiatives. It's a holistic cycle, in which a business's employees are key. We'll take a closer look at this cycle below – explaining how, if they're to become truly sustainable, cleaning and soft FM service providers must invest in people as well as the right products and processes.

Greener cleaning products and processes

At Nanogreen, we recognise that society and the environment are inextricably linked. That's why we're working to make a positive difference, not just to the world around us, but in the communities we serve.

Eco-friendly cleaning products and energy-efficient processes are one side of the coin, helping us to make our cleaning and soft FM services more sustainable. Indeed, traditional cleaning chemicals pose a risk to users and the environment; even disposing of them has an environmental impact.

With this in mind, a growing number of commercial cleaning and soft FM service providers are reducing their reliance on harsh chemicals – and opting, where possible, for biological alternatives.

These alternatives range from 'aqueous ozone' (a strong oxidising agent, comprising three atoms found in the atmosphere), to the kind of bio-based cleaning agents (which often contain enzymes capable of breaking down dirt molecules) Nanogreen's technicians rely on. Natural and efficient, they deliver the same results as traditional cleaning chemicals, but without negatively impacting users or the environment.

Elsewhere, washable mop heads and cloths can help to reduce waste – as can reviewing the amount of single-use plastic packaging associated with cleaning products. Nanogreen now opts for more sustainable alternatives (like sugar cane plastic) where possible.

And, when it comes to window cleaning, 'pure water' (which has been filtered to remove natural minerals) offers an efficient and eco-friendly alternative to polluting detergents.

Ultimately, a sustainability strategy should be just that – sustainable. Businesses might struggle to eliminate traditional cleaning chemicals entirely, or to introduce an electric fleet overnight. Nevertheless, they can make impactful changes, operating more sustainably – and helping clients to meet their own ESG (environmental, social and governance) objectives as a result.

Investing in people

People are the other side of this coin – which is why Nanogreen has committed to providing job opportunities for those deemed 'furthest from employment'.

Indeed, for individuals struggling to access or re-enter employment, the right role (coupled with adequate support) can be life-changing. And helping vulnerable people to find jobs has wider societal benefits; it saves money for local authorities, the NHS, and overstretched social care service providers.

Ultimately, individuals who are earning the Living Wage, and who feel valued and supported, are in a position to make greener choices.

This concept underpins Nanogreen's approach to sustainability. Working closely with a range of local charities, we provide short and long-term job opportunities for people facing barriers to employment. They might have experienced homelessness, or struggle with mental health conditions or substance issues.

Once in work, individuals continue to receive support, with any formal programmes implemented and documented via the 'Aspire' network. This network also allows us to coordinate with counsellors, social workers and support workers.

If any Nanogreen employee finds themselves struggling, they can access two sessions with a self-help coach trained in neuro-linguistic programming, before being referred for further support. Three members of the team (including myself and director Craig) have trained as mental health first aiders, meaning we're better equipped to help those in need.

The knowledge that support is available if required empowers employees, who feel able – not just to stay in work – but to deliver the very best service for our clients.

Coupled with the Living Wage, this support also helps individuals to make more considered and sustainable choices. Many of our staff now shop locally, or use green products at home.

The benefits of sustainability

Ultimately, a holistic approach to sustainability has benefits for communities, the environment, and the supply chain. And, while partnering with a service provider like Nanogreen might not be the cheapest option, it will pay dividends for companies keen to prioritise ESG.

The takeaway: it's worth considering, not just what products and processes your sustainable supply partner uses, but how they're supporting people.