

# Green Living – Green Cleaners

By Daniel Soh

Do you know what chemicals are being spread across your table as you clean it? Most people would not care much about it, as long as the job of cleaning is done. However, what if you found out that the cleaning detergent you have been using actually contains toxins?

About 18 months back, Colin Pudsey, a British National, relocated to Singapore to work on energy saving projects for the IT infrastructure in both government agencies and private businesses. Like many expatriates in Singapore, he hired a domestic helper for housekeeping every week. However, he was far from satisfied. "My apartment was not cleaned up to my expectations... More worryingly, I started to experience chest problems. Upon some research on the net, I was horrified to learn the side effects that household cleaning detergents can have." Caused by chemicals commonly used in household cleaning detergents, such as butyl cellosolve and ammonia, these side-effects include irritation to the skin, eyes and respiratory system, hormonal disruptions and even liver or kidney damage.

Having been involved in environmental projects in a variety of countries over the past 5 years, Colin was no stranger to taking the initiative on the green front. So, 9 months ago, he founded *Green Cleaners*. Today, as one of the leaders in the Singapore market for green cleaning, *Green Cleaners* offers cleaning services that use only non-toxic and environmentally friendly products. The helpers do not just use these products, however, but rather act as "green agents" themselves. Colin

described his domestic helpers' attitudes and professionalism, "They are also eco-friendly trained on how to use the products effectively, as well as why they are using them and the



benefits. They are mindful of the environment, saving energy and water as well as reducing, reusing and recycling where possible."

To further promote green living, Colin began conducting "Learn Green – Live Green" classes for live-in helpers. He elaborated on the class curriculum, "These classes will help them become more mindful of the environment, and perhaps save their employers a few dollars along the way! The classes will focus on

saving energy and water, as well as eco-friendly cleaning tips, waste management and the three 'R's - Recycling, Reusing, Reducing." For those who prefer their cleaning to be done by live-in helpers or even by themselves, *Green Cleaners* also offers, with a small premium, specially selected "green home cleaning kits" that they deliver to the customer's doorstep.

Since the recent global financial crisis, Singaporeans have been tightening their belts to "save their spare cash" by cutting down their entertainment spending and purchase of luxury goods, as well as day-to-day costs such as petrol or (hopefully) utilities. However, there is a reasonable limit to how much people would save on, especially in terms of necessities, including cleanliness and hygiene.

According to the Ministry of Manpower, Singa-

pore has over 150,000 live-in helpers, largely employed in households where both parents work, but do not wish to send their children to childcare centres. By comparison, part-time domestic helpers may be seen as a luxury reserved for well-heeled singles, with little reason or indication that this trend is likely to change soon. While there is still room for growth of agencies like *Green Cleaners* in providing part-time domestic helpers, live-in helpers are still likely to remain as a majority in the coming years.

On that note, it is the initiative to raise awareness of such green products that will create a widespread impact in the cleaning sector. While every bit counts, green living is a change that almost every household can take, regardless of how they clean their houses. Even for those unwilling to fork out the cash for premiums attached to green products, green cleaning and living involves more than a simple change in product choice, but also a change in habits and mindsets – one of the most important steps in making a difference to the environment.

So, take up a workshop or plug in to the wealth of information that we now have and take another step forward to making a positive green impact to the environment

*Green Cleaner's* website can be found at: <http://www.green-cleaners.asia/> ■

