

ACM LEADERSHIP CALL NOTES

Cleaning Practices at Children's Museums Tuesday, September 28, 2010, 2:00 p.m. ET

Moderator: Brenda Baker, Exhibits Director, Madison Children's Museum

I. Welcome & Introduction

Korie Twiggs, ACM program officer, education, introduced the call. Twiggs indicated that the Spring 2008 issue of *Hand to Hand*, "Clean and Green," which includes natural cleaning recipes, and profiles of museum cleaning practices is available for backorder. ACM members pay just \$5 for a PDF or hard copy of the issue. Email acm@ChildrensMuseums.org to order a copy.

II. Case Study: Green Cleaning at Madison Children's Museum

Brenda Baker welcomed all of the participants and shared information about cleaning practices at Madison Children's Museum (MCM), which opened in a new building on August 14, 2010.

- Prior to opening the new building, MCM's cleaning policy included use of the following natural products: vinegar, baking soda and lemon juice. The museum is currently in the process of retrofitting the types and quantities of cleaning solutions that work best for the museum. While the former building saw 90,000 visitors annually, the new building has welcomed more than 50,000 visitors within the first six weeks of opening. Because of this high volume/usage, they are considering using a combination of natural and commercial cleaners.
- In the past, MCM observed that a smaller audience tends to be more responsible at picking up after themselves in the exhibit areas. This has not been the practice with guests in the new building, which hosts a larger number of visitors (although staff encourages them to pick up as a part of learning).
- MCM eliminated the use of many toys in the new museum due to concerns about lead and heavy metal content. In the new museum, fake food is made of wool (recycled sweaters), which is easy to launder.
- MCM currently uses "yuck bags." Parents are instructed to place any object that their child has placed in his or her mouth in these bags, so that the object can be properly cleaned to eliminate the spread of germs.
- Since hand washing is considered the best practice, the use of hand sanitizers is limited to MCM's new rooftop where animals are kept (chickens, pigeons, etc.). MCM uses a combination of aloe vera gel, water, tea tree oil, lavender oil and grain alcohol to make their homemade hand sanitizer. Additionally, the rooftop is equipped with a sink so that guests have the option of using hand sanitizer or washing their hands.

III. Open Floor Discussion

A. Green Cleaning Products

- Madison Children's Museum (WI) recommended the green seal certified product, 3M™ Twist 'n Fill™. The product is easy to use and dispenses exactly the right amount for appropriate cleaning.
- COSI (Columbus, OH) recommended Peroxy HDOX, an EPA registered, green seal approved disinfectant. The solution is a peroxide-based chemical used for all purpose cleaning (windows, carpets, etc). Solution strength may be changed and/or controlled by the amount of water used with the product. Because it is an all purpose solution, its use reduces the cost of purchasing various cleaning agents and cuts down on storage space.
- Koch Family Children's Museum of Evansville (IN) recommended hydrogen peroxide as a nontoxic, multi-purpose cleaning agent.
- Children's Museum of Phoenix (AZ) uses microfiber cleaning cloths as an alternative to paper towels for cleaning. The cloths may be laundered for continued use and provide a significant savings from the cost of paper towels.

B. Recycling & Composting

- COSI (Columbus, OH) & Koch Family Children's Museum of Evansville (IN) both participate in an electronic recycling program in an effort to remove their outdated electronic devices.
- Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose (CA) shared that they received funds from the City of San Jose to develop a composting program. The museum uses a three bin sorting system (garbage, recycling and compost). Staff is responsible for ensuring that items are properly sorted at the end of each day but a detailed signage instructs visitors how they can assist. Recently, the city confirmed that the museum successfully diverted 99 percent of its café waste from landfills through composting. Although the city removes most of the compost matter, the museum keeps some for its garden exhibit. The museum reports significant cost savings by composting verses relying on standard trash pickup.
- Greensboro Children's Museum (NC) has developed a composting system in their staff kitchen. The museum also has an edible schoolyard exhibit where they educate visitors about composting.

C. General Cleaning Strategies and Staffing

- Children's Museum of Pittsburgh (PA) uses both an outside contractor in combination with museum staff to clean the museum. Staff is responsible for cleaning the exhibits while the contracted service focuses on general cleaning. The combination of having both outside and in-house cleaning sources has saved the museum approximately \$20,000 annually in cleaning expenses and the museum has more control over the cleaning process.
- Children's Museum of Greensboro (NC) reports that their education staff is responsible for collecting, cleaning and re-setting exhibits Monday through Friday and that their floor staff cleans on the weekend.
- Betty Brinn Children's Museum (Milwaukee, WI) enlists their visitor services staff to manage the daily, detailed cleaning of their exhibits spaces. The museum hired a contracted service to clean five out of the seven nights per week (from 6 p.m.-10 p.m.) while in-house staff is responsible for cleaning on the remaining two nights.
- Koch Family Children's Museum of Evansville (IN) participates in a program through the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) that pays seniors to learn new job skills. The AARP's *Senior Community Service Employment Program* places low- and limited-income

senior citizens in jobs at nonprofit or public agencies in the community. AARP pays the worker, and the nonprofit organizations get skilled help at no cost. The museum currently retains four seniors who clean the museum daily for a total of 20 hours per week.

- Children’s Museum of New Hampshire (Dover) employs a staff cleaning crew that arrives daily after closing or prior to opening. They are responsible for cleaning the restrooms, floors, emptying trash and removing recycled items. Museum staff is responsible for cleaning the exhibit galleries and the public cleaning spaces during business hours. The museum developed a manual with recommendations for cleaning exhibits and museum “hot spots.”
- WOW! Children’s Museum (Lafayette, CO) uses laminated lists to delegate daily cleaning responsibilities. Cleaning assignments are divided and distributed to staff. When a staff member has completed an item, they initial it with dry erase markers. This system allows for checks and balances for daily cleaning.
- Grand Rapids Children’s Museum (MI) has a “facilitator of the month” incentive plan. A point system tracks staff performance over a range of areas (e.g. museum cleaning, on time arrival, compliments/nominations from museum visitors, etc.). Once a month, one staff member receives a \$20 gift card in recognition of their overall performance.

D. Cleaning Water Exhibits

- Children’s Museum of Houston (TX) has a large outside water exhibit, which given the climate, generates algae. The museum conducts daily cleanings as well as a once a week deep cleaning. They have switched from using chlorine to bromine, which is a milder cleaning agent. They have also changed from reusable to disposable water filters as the disposable filters are less likely to clog.
- Escondido Children’s Museum (CA) dumps and refills the water in their water table exhibit daily. Additionally, the empty water table is scrubbed with a brush prior to being refilled with fresh water. The museum does not use chemicals to clean.
- Buell Children’s Museum (Pueblo, CO) dumps water from their large water table daily and uses a wet/dry vacuum to speed up the cleaning process.
- WOW! Children’s Museum (Lafayette, CO) uses a water pump to extract water from their bubble exhibit. The pump drains the water quickly, allowing them to conduct a thorough wipe-down of the exhibit at the end of each day.

E. HINI & Other Health Issues

- Children’s Museum of Brownsville (TX) shared that in the aftermath of the 2009 HINI outbreak they have gone from changing their air filters monthly to bi-weekly. Additionally, they have incorporated a once a month heavy-duty dusting and deep cleaning.
- Children’s Museum of Greensboro (NC) sprays the hats in their dress-up area with vodka (daily) to kill lice.
- Buell Children’s Museum (Lafayette, CO) sprays Lysol daily on the dress up hats to avoid a lice outbreak.
- Madison Children’s Museum (WI) commented that they have enough hats in the dress-up area so that once a hat is worn, it is immediately laundered.
- Several institutions indicated that they do not provide hats to avoid health concerns.

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