

## Good Jobs, Green Future: Twin Cities janitors launch green cleaning campaign

Written by

Wednesday, 09 December 2009 16:34

---

Hundreds of Twin Cities janitors, joined by Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak, Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman and US Rep. Keith Ellison, kicked off their campaign to make green cleaning a reality in the Twin Cities by reducing waste, saving energy, and reducing the use of toxic chemicals. SEIU Local 26 represents over 4,000 janitors that clean the majority of buildings in the seven-county metropolitan area, and is preparing to bargain a new contract with all major janitorial contractors in the market.

“With our economy in a recession, we all need to think about ways to make our work smarter,” said Javier Morillo-Alicea, President of SEIU Local 26. “We want to help make this industry part of our new green economy by increasing the use of green cleaning products with safer chemicals, recycling more trash, and supporting the transition to day-shift cleaning that can reduce energy use and reduce the carbon footprint of hundreds of buildings in our region.”

Day shift cleaning is a growing trend in the cleaning industry; it can reduce energy use by up to 8%, and leads to better client satisfaction with a stable, well-trained cleaning staff. And while safer, “green” chemicals are now available at little or no additional cost, there is still pervasive use of more dangerous, conventional cleaning products. In a recent member survey conducted by SEIU Local 26, over one-third of janitors reported chemicals sometimes or often irritating their eyes or skin.

“We are happy to have an opportunity to make our jobs green, but we also want to make sure they are stable, 8-hour full-time jobs that can support our families,” said Marie Flores, a janitor at Travelers in Saint Paul and a member of SEIU Local 26. “We are willing to do our part to make our work safer and better for the environment, but at Travelers 'going green' meant reduced work hours and new work and language requirements for all of us with little advance notice and no opportunity for training. Going green should be a win-win for everybody.”

Participants also hailed the work of the newest members of SEIU Local 26, the Safe and Clean Ambassadors of the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District. “We are proud to be Ambassadors for Downtown Minneapolis, and we are committed to making Minneapolis greener, cleaner, and safer,” said John Johnston, a Clean Ambassador for the Downtown Improvement District and a new member of SEIU Local 26. “But those of us cleaning outside right now make \$1.30 less per hour than our fellow union members who work inside, and we can't afford the health insurance.”

The janitors' campaign has gained the support of environmental organizations including the Blue Green Alliance, Minnesota Public Interest Research Group, and the Sierra Club. “The Minnesota North Star Chapter of the Sierra Club is proud to stand with SEIU Local 26 in their efforts to make janitorial jobs part of our new green economy,” said Margaret Levin, Sierra Club State Director. “Their efforts will prove that we can reduce global warming pollution and energy use while also ensuring good, full-time jobs that can support a family.”

The current union contract for janitors throughout the seven-county metropolitan area expires on December 31.