

Schneider Paper Products Explains How pH Affects the Performance of Commercial Cleaning Chemicals

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Commercial cleaning chemicals are formulated to handle different types of soils, residues, stains, and contaminants, and one of the factors affecting how those products perform is pH.

[Schneider Paper Products](#) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is providing information about how the pH scale relates to commercial cleaning products and why matching a chemical to the type of soil and surface can affect cleaning results.

The pH scale generally ranges from 0 to 14. A value of 7 is considered neutral. Values below 7 are acidic, while values above 7 are alkaline. Different cleaning challenges may respond differently depending on where a cleaning solution falls on that scale.

“pH is one of the basic chemical characteristics that helps determine how a cleaning product interacts with a particular type of soil,” said [Destin Pizer](#) of Schneider Paper Products in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. “Grease, mineral deposits, soap residue, and other soils have different properties, so a chemical that works well in one situation may not be appropriate in another.”

Alkaline Cleaners Are Often Used for Grease and Organic Soils

Many commercial degreasers and heavy-duty cleaners are alkaline.

Grease, oils, fats, food residues, and other organic soils can be difficult to remove with water alone. Alkaline cleaning chemicals can help break down or loosen those materials so they can be removed from surfaces.





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Commercial kitchens provide a common example.

Cooking oils and grease can accumulate on floors, equipment, walls, hoods, and other surfaces. Products formulated on the alkaline side of the pH scale are often used for those applications because of the type of soil involved.

Higher alkalinity does not automatically mean a product is appropriate for every cleaning task.

Surface compatibility, concentration, contact time, temperature, and application method also matter.

Acidic Cleaners Address Different Types of Deposits

Acidic cleaners are commonly associated with mineral-related soils.

Hard-water deposits, lime scale, calcium buildup, rust staining, and certain restroom deposits may respond to acidic formulations.

These types of soils differ chemically from grease and food residues.

That difference explains why a degreaser intended for a commercial kitchen may perform poorly against mineral buildup in a restroom.

The chemical needs to match the soil.

Acidic products can also react with certain materials, including some natural stones, metals, and other surfaces. Product instructions and surface compatibility therefore remain important considerations.

Neutral Cleaners Have Different Applications

Not every cleaning job requires chemistry at either end of the pH scale.

Neutral cleaners, generally formulated near pH 7, are often used for routine cleaning where aggressive soil removal is unnecessary.

Certain finished floors, painted surfaces, and other materials may require cleaners designed to remove ordinary dirt without exposing the surface to strongly acidic or alkaline conditions.

Routine maintenance and heavy restoration are different tasks.

A floor receiving daily cleaning may need a different chemical than the same floor after grease, mineral deposits, or embedded soils have accumulated.

Understanding the purpose of the cleaning procedure helps determine which type of formulation is appropriate.

Stronger Chemistry Is Not Always Better Chemistry

A common misconception surrounding commercial cleaners is that a product with a more extreme pH will automatically clean better.

Cleaning chemistry is more complicated than that.

A strongly alkaline product may perform well against grease while doing little for mineral scale. A strongly acidic product might address mineral deposits while being unnecessary or inappropriate for routine floor cleaning.

Concentration also matters.

Using more chemical than the manufacturer recommends does not necessarily improve cleaning. Excess product can leave residue, increase rinsing requirements, affect surfaces, or create unnecessary chemical exposure.

The correct chemical used at the correct dilution is generally more meaningful than simply selecting the strongest formulation available.

Contact Time Can Affect Chemical Performance

Cleaning chemicals often need time to interact with soil.

Applying a product and immediately removing it may not provide sufficient contact time for the chemistry to work as intended.

Manufacturers commonly provide instructions covering dilution, dwell time, application method, rinsing, and other factors.

These instructions can vary substantially between products.

A degreaser may require time to break down oily residue. A mineral-removing product may need time to react with scale. A disinfectant may have a specific required contact time unrelated to visible soil removal.

Chemical performance therefore depends on more than pH alone.

Water Can Influence Cleaning Results

Water quality can also affect commercial cleaning.

Hard water contains dissolved minerals that may interact with cleaning chemicals or contribute to deposits on surfaces.

Water temperature can influence certain cleaning processes as well.

Some chemicals perform differently in cold or warm water, and manufacturer instructions may specify appropriate conditions.

In commercial settings involving frequent cleaning, such variables can become noticeable over time.

Restaurants, schools, healthcare facilities, offices, industrial operations, and other buildings may each encounter different soil and water conditions.

Surface Compatibility Matters

A cleaning chemical must be considered in relation to both the contaminant and the material underneath it.

Tile, concrete, stainless steel, aluminum, natural stone, resilient flooring, painted surfaces, glass, and other materials can respond differently to acids and alkalis.

A product capable of removing a particular deposit may also damage an incompatible surface.

Testing procedures, manufacturer recommendations, dilution instructions, and safety information can help reduce that risk.

"Cleaning is really a combination of chemistry, soil type, surface material, time, and mechanical action," Pizer said. "Looking only at whether a chemical is acidic or alkaline leaves out several other factors that determine what happens during the cleaning process."

Mixing Chemicals Can Create Serious Hazards

Understanding pH does not mean cleaning products should be combined in an attempt to create different chemical strengths.

Certain commercial and household cleaning chemicals can produce dangerous reactions when mixed.

Acids and chlorine-containing products, for example, can create hazardous gases under some conditions.

Products should be used according to label directions rather than experimentally combined.

Safety data sheets, product labels, personal protective equipment requirements, ventilation instructions, and storage guidelines are important parts of commercial chemical handling.

pH Is One Part of Cleaning Chemistry

The pH scale provides a useful starting point for understanding why different commercial cleaning chemicals behave differently.

Acidic cleaners, alkaline cleaners, and neutral cleaners each serve different purposes.

The goal is not simply to move farther away from neutral.

The goal is to match the chemistry to the soil, the surface, and the cleaning task.

Grease and mineral scale may both look like dirt.

Chemically, they can be very different problems.

That difference is why the bottle chosen for the job matters.

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