

# MYTHS ABOUT HANDWASHING AND HAND DRYING

By Stephen Ashkin



Most of us know just how important handwashing is in protecting our health, and we all agree that one of the goals in the professional cleaning industry is to encourage everyone to wash their hands properly and frequently.

However, according to Stephen Ashkin, the 'father of Green Cleaning' who is helping foster sustainability within the professional cleaning industry, there are a few myths about hand washing that we need to be aware of.

## **Myth: Always wash with hot water.**

Most of us think hot water helps kill germs and bacteria on our hands. But the reality is, the water would have to be scalding hot to make that happen. In fact, hot water may work against us. Water that is too hot may cause us to remove our hands too quickly to wash properly. Further, researchers in Florida found that there is statistically little difference whether hands are washed in hot or cold water.

## **Myth: Always use antibacterial soap when washing hands.**

During 2007, a study of Triclosan, which was used in hand soap and is now banned in the US, did not significantly reduce the number of bacteria on hands. Since then other studies have come to similar conclusions about many other antibacterial hand soaps.

## **Myth: You don't have to dry your hands after washing.**

Some people wash their hands, shake them off, and then fly out the



door. Drying hands helps remove any remaining microbes on hands plus it is easier for pathogens to collect on hands that are wet.

## **Myth: Using hand towels is the best way to dry hands.**

This is true and for a variety of reasons. First, correctly using a hand towel to dry hands takes about 10 seconds. Studies indicate it can take as long as 45 seconds for some electric hand dryers to remove moisture from hands thoroughly, far too long for most people to wait. In addition some studies indicate that hand dryers can spread microbes to nearby surfaces, increasing the chances of cross-contamination.

*"Handwashing is like everything else," says Ashkin, President of The Ashkin Group, a consulting firm specialising in greening the cleaning industry, and CEO of Sustainability Dashboard Tools. "If you're going to do it, and I hope you do, you have to do it correctly."*

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