What's the Difference?
Cleaning ▪ Disinfecting ▪ Sanitizing

Cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing are three terms that are commonplace in safety vocabulary. The problem is that while these terms are used interchangeably, their meanings are quite different. Understanding the difference between cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing is an important part of promoting safe work practices. This handout was developed using information provided by the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (CDC), *Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*, and *the Public Health Agency of Canada* and is intended for use by IATSE workers. The information in this handout is not exhaustive and entire trainings can and should be done to ensure that safe cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing practices are being implemented at work.

- **<u>Cleaning</u> removes germs**, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects. Cleaning works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces.

  The CDC recommends cleaning a surface using soap and water prior to using a disinfectant.

- **<u>Disinfecting</u> kills germs** on surfaces or objects. This works by using chemicals to kill germs. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

  Before using disinfectant, the CDC recommends that you *always* read and follow the directions on the label to ensure safe and effective use.

- **<u>Sanitizing</u> lowers the number of germs** on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements. This process **works by either cleaning or disinfecting** surfaces or objects to lower the risk of spreading infection.

  The proper combination of cleaning and disinfecting is recommended for preventing the spread of infectious diseases on objects and surfaces. Workers should always refer to manufacturer instructions on how to properly clean and disinfect equipment.

  Surface disinfecting products are more effective at killing germs than surface sanitizing products, according to the United States EPA and the Government of Canada. In addition, hand 'sanitizers' are not disinfectants and not as effective as proper handwashing with soap and water.

Resources

- CDC, Cleaning & Disinfecting Schools: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm
- CDC, When and How to Clean and Disinfect a Facility: https://www.cdc.gov/hygiene/cleaning/facility.html
- EPA, What's the difference between products that disinfect, sanitize, and clean surfaces?: https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/whats-difference-between-products-disinfect-sanitize-and-clean-surfaces
- Canada, Cleaning and disinfecting public spaces during COVID-19: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/cleaning-disinfecting-public-spaces.html
- Canada, Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers (COVID-19): https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19.html