

Hesperian Cleaners, San Lorenzo, California

Leading the Green Cleaning Wave

Concerned by the potential health hazards associated with the use of perchloroethylene (PERC), a traditional dry cleaning chemical, Hesperian Cleaners decided to go green. “I didn’t want to change it to another solvent or another type of chemical,” says owner Sung Han Lee. Therefore, five years ahead of the new mandated schedule to phase out PERC, Mr. Lee chose a new process called wet cleaning. Rather than switching to a “less bad” process using hydrocarbon solvents, Hesperian Cleaners decided to go with the only process that can be truly called organic. The wet cleaning process includes a computer controlled cleaning machine that uses a small amount of water with biodegradable detergent. It uses less water than other dry cleaning processes and, unlike most cleaning processes, does not generate any hazardous toxic waste.

Mr. Lee takes pride in guaranteeing his customers and employees a safe and healthy environment. He also helps other dry cleaners to be green and has developed a group, the Professional Green Cleaner Alliance, to share experiences and exchange information to limit their environmental impacts and improve their customer’s satisfaction.



Photo Credit: Paolo Vescia Photography

Business Snapshot

Hesperian Cleaners, open since 1982, is Alameda County’s first green dry cleaning business.

Climate Friendly Actions

- Converted to wet cleaning process
- Recycles hangers
- Insulated steam pipes which reduced energy consumption by 5%
- Offers customers recycled poly bags or no bags on cleaned garments
- Used low-volatile organic compound (VOC) paints to paint shops
- Installed low energy bulbs
- Uses day lighting in call office instead of switching on the lights
- Powers down all equipment when not in use and when shop is closed

Estimated Yearly Reductions of CO₂:

- Reduction in energy consumption: 50% from combined equipment upgrades and conservation actions
- Reduction in water consumption: 36,000 gallons from new machines



Photo Credit: Hesperian Cleaners

Award Winning Actions



What Actions Did Hesperian Cleaners Take to Reduce Waste?

Hesperian Cleaners encourage their customers to bring in used hangers for recycling by providing them with hanger caddies. They offer customers a recyclable poly bag option or even no bag at all.

What actions did Hesperian Cleaners Take to Save Energy?

Hesperian Cleaners not only replaced dry cleaning machines with the wet cleaning machines, they also replaced other machines including the shirt pressers and laundry washing machine, with new energy efficient models. They replaced all of their lighting with low energy bulbs and they use natural light from the windows instead of turning on the lights in the call office. Hesperian insulated all of their steam pipes which reduced their energy consumption by 5% and helps to keep the facility cool.

How Have Hesperian Cleaners Efforts Been Recognized?

Hesperian Cleaners is the first dry cleaning business to receive awards from several programs. They are the first in Alameda County to be a Bay Area Green Business. In 2008 they were awarded the Environmental Business Award for Pollution Prevention/Resource Conservation by the non-profit group ACTERRA in the Bay Area. They also received a CoolCalifornia.org Small Business Excellence Award in 2009 for their commitment to environmental stewardship and communication in the dry cleaning community.

“I started going to Hesperian Cleaners after seeing an article in the Chronicle about green cleaning. Green cleaning is great by itself, but the most important and BEST thing about Hesperian Cleaners is that my clothing comes back to me as if it is brand new. No more terrible dry cleaning smell!”

-L.B., San Lorenzo Customer



Photo Credit: Miele Inc.

“We are sustainable, viable, and the future will go overall to my customers, to the environment, to my employees, my family, and myself. It is a win-win situation.”

-Sung Han Lee, Owner
Hesperian Cleaners



Photo Credit: Air Resources Board

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