

The good, the bad and the ugly



Outstanding cleaning solutions like this are the result of good staffing according to NViro.

The BBC's Secret Life of an Office Cleaner showed appalling industry practices in London but fortunately NViro offers something for the industry to be proud of

Illegal employment, shoddy treatment of staff and poor pay were among the shocking issues highlighted in the BBC TV programme *The Secret Life of an Office Cleaner*. The programme painted a picture of an industry where exploitation of illegal immigrants is common. It showed groups of untrained, unqualified cleaners with a poor grasp of English working at rates at or below the minimum wage with little concern given to their welfare.

So is it really that bad and is anything being done to improve standards? Stephen MacDonald, Sales and Marketing Manager for NViro, one of the companies trying to break the mould by offering better training and support to its cleaners, says that while there are serious problems in the industry that need to be addressed, such as illegal employment and poor staff welfare, these problems are by no means indicative of all contractors. He explained: "The employment of illegal immigrants on lower pay than the minimum wage does happen in the UK. Often, illegal immigrants are the only people willing to accept the lowest paid cleaning jobs which exacerbates the problem. There are also difficulties with legal immigrants who do not speak English but these problems are being addressed in some parts of the industry."

One place where staffing is taken seriously is NViro. The company believes good employment conditions, training and support are critical to improving recruitment and retention, performance and client satisfaction.

"The challenge NViro and the entire cleaning industry faces is not only to ensure the legality of employees but to pay reasonable rates, overcome language and cultural barriers and improve staff welfare. "NViro is meeting this challenge by offering competitive rates to attract the right calibre people, checking the eligibility of applicants with the relevant authorities, providing an effective payroll system, on-going training and a range of staff benefits "In particular we are spreading the practice of translating key written documents such as health and safety information, room cleaning schedules and induction training literature into, among other languages, Polish and Chinese."