

SETTING PUBLIC TOILET STANDARDS DOWN UNDER

Introduction

Historically the standard of public toilets has suffered from being low on local governments priority list. There are signs that this is changing. Local Government Councils and State Government Departments administering National Parks and the like have an ongoing agenda to maintain the current infrastructure and in some instances are either closing down or replacing older facilities with smaller units which impact less on the environment.

Making People More Aware.

As reported to previous conferences (China 2004 Summit) Australia's Department Of Ageing has established a web site (www.toiletmap.gov.au) which displays over 14000 public toilets across Australia. This map was established to assist people with health issues who are required to frequently use toilets in their daily activities of shopping business, recreation and/or travel across Australia.

The map gives directions, address, gender availability, accessibility for the disabled, hours of availability and description to adjacent points of interest. It has received hits from overseas enquirers with favourable comments on the information provided. Research is currently underway to allow the information to be accessed from mobile phones in the near future.

Disability and Discrimination Legislation

Strong attention to people's rights and what is regarded as a 'fair go' is very much a part of the Australia's psyche. Legislation introduced back in the 1980's has seen the Australian Building Code include regulations requiring a public toilet (Class 10A) to have a toilet cubicle which is fully accessible ie, suitable for use by people who are wheelchair bound. In recent years regulations also require for any second cubicle to be suitable for people who have ambulant disabilities.

Minimum requirements for these cubicles are contained in a 4 part 'suite' of Standards for 'Design for Access and Mobility' covering general requirements for new building work (AS 1428.1), enhanced and additional requirements for buildings and facilities (AS1428.2), requirements for children and adolescents with physical disabilities (AS 1428.3) and lastly tactile indicators (AS1428.4).

Since 1993, by far the majority of public toilet installations have accessible cubicles built to the minimum standard (AS1428.1) which allows access by 80 % of wheelchairs. This provides a minimum circulation space of 1600mm x 2000mm. Proposals are underway to introduce a minimum circulation space of 1900mm X 2300mm, currently provided in AS1428.2. This will allow access to be gained by 90% of wheelchairs available to the

community. The base dimension of the wheelchair being used for this exercise is 800mmx 1300mm. ****PP- Circ'n Space 1428.1 &2****

It is understood toilets built to AS 1428.1 circulation criteria may not satisfy DDA requirements as the standard does not take into account larger wheelchairs mentioned above hence the need for upgrading. The Australian Building Code is to be amended to require both existing and new buildings to comply with the increased sizes to avoid an owner or developer being taken to the D& D Commission for non compliance (a course which is available to individuals at the moment).

While these new regulations were to be introduced 12 months ago, the high number of submissions requires a review of proposals which has delayed their introduction to 2006 at least.

Cubicles for people with ambulant disabilities are considerably smaller (approx 900mm wide), have handrails on both walls adjacent to the toilet pan and at least 900 mm clear space between the nose of the pan and the door arc or, face of door. **** (PP -CS FIG38/39)****

Layout and Anti Social Use

With new installations there is a strong move to eradicate common areas which allow congregation and loitering particularly in standalone toilet installations. Toilets within major shopping centres are still accessed down narrow corridors unlike some Singapore and Chinese toilets which are located upfront off communal spaces or shop fronts.

Recent designs and installations by some Victorian and Tasmanian municipalities has seen multi unisex or gender separated compartments toilets constructed to the same principles as the APT's ie, doors opening directly onto the open space. ****PP(see Launceston and Manningham photos)******

Installation of locally produced APT'S has also allowed municipalities to install an adjacent compliant accessible toilet alongside existing toilets and in some instances the older existing toilets particularly those which have some heritage overlay are not demolished but are for use when occasional events require extra pans. ****PP(Osmond Drive Adel)****

New office/factory buildings are being fitted with unisex accessible toilets in lieu of separate gender cubicles especially where staff numbers are low and where the occasional visitor is a wheelchair user. Although actual statistical evidence is not available, one gets the impression that fewer urinals are being installed and where they are, waterless urinals are gaining in popularity.

More emphasis is being placed on preparing a toilet review and/or strategy for either an area such as a shopping strip or indeed a whole municipality. With this forward planning Councils are able to review the need to retain an existing facility rather than demolish or close it as in the past. Where an existing toilet is structurally sound and of reasonable

appearance so as to warrant its retention, its layout may need to be modified to overcome inherent anti social problems particularly loitering, illegal drug use and provocative use. It also allows for orderly provision of toilets, the setting of a budget and financial program to be prepared. ****PP(Brisbane Photos and Drawings)****

To achieve these results Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles are being practiced by some municipalities particularly when installing new stand alone toilets and making a decision on how an existing toilet can be modified to reduce the antisocial use in the future. This process may involve removing existing shrubs and foliage or other adjacent facilities to reduce personal attacks on toilet users or altering the layout by removing excess cubicles and external partitions to allow more vision into the common areas.

Ongoing Maintenance

Changes in this area are slow due mainly to budget constraints not catering for improved cleaning and increased vandalism of the public environment. Little is done to educate school children or the public in trying to reduce the problem at the source. Efforts are made to remove graffiti within 24 hours and this may include a local laws fine on a property owner in not taking steps to eradicate the graffiti within a specified time. One Council at considerable expense has introduced its 3E program of 'Education, Eradication and Enforcement' with such success that its graffiti removal costs have dropped from \$450,000 to \$140,000 over a two year period. On the up side a small number of Councils are considering introducing the same program.

Despite cleaning specifications placing emphasis on cleaners having uniforms, vehicles having appropriate signage, cleaning/attendance up to 3 times per day at some toilets, monitoring by both the contractor together with frequent municipality's auditing, by far the main criteria of acceptance of a successful contractor relates to cost. With upgraded auditing and more accent on methods rather than costs, Councils will over a period of time improve the image of the neglected public toilet that mum, dad and the kids refuse to use because of the substandard cleaning undertaken by old untrained part time cleaners.

The Future

With Capital Cities viding for world class events such as the Olympic and/or Commonwealth Games, Grand Prix, World Football and other major sporting attractions, providers are becoming conscious of recognizing the need to provide world class facilities, including quality Public Toilets with accent on reducing ongoing maintenance costs, if they are to be successful in attracting these events to their cities.

Sustainability is being recognized by our Company and municipalities looking at reducing electricity costs through linking photo-voltaic panels to smart metering, providing more natural light and grid connected, water efficiency and recycling measures

to ease the burden of flushing fresh water into our environment. **** (PP Solar Panels and Going Solar/Rocla water Recycling)****

Thank you for listening to my presentation.

Bill Chapman
President Australian Toilet Association
MD - WC Convenience Management Pty. Ltd