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RESTROOM ASSOCIATION (SINGAPORE) NEWSLETTER - January 2004

Contents

1. Message from Jack Sim
 - Bad public toilets affect the image and health of a country's people and return of investment on businesses
2. International Volunteer Day celebrated in 107 countries
 - There are many volunteers out there. Volunteering for RAS is no different from doing social work, helping the young etc.
3. News Bites
4. One-liner that says all about your business
 - What do you think of RAS new tagline?
5. Where Colour TV is more important than Toilets
 - Hear an environment activist's experience about providing toilets in rural India. Can you help?
6. Metroped USA
 - Spotlight on one of World Toilet Organisation's member
 - Find out who are the 'restroom challenged'

Message from Jack Sim, President of Restroom Association of Singapore



A very Gong Xi Fa Cai to one and all. Like the picture 'auspicious cranes dancing to bring spring back to earth' we wish you a very auspicious Year of the Monkey.

In any civil society, the provision of proper public toilet facilities should be regarded as a matter of course. It is a basic infrastructure for the good of public health.

Without toilets, life would be very different. They preserve our human dignity and privacy. The level of toilet facilities shows how much respect the building owner accords to his guests/visitors.



And from the national perspective, public toilets are a representation of the civility of the society. No one wants to visit a place where there is no proper sanitation. Not only will tourists keep away, even potential investors will turn their heads and look elsewhere.

In fact, a country that offers poor public toilet facilities will soon discover how damaging the negative branding through word-of-mouth can be, and that you will need very deep advertising budgets to quell the perception.

A more direct cost to the country is the money that the government has to spend on public health. Imagine a country where because of a lack of proper public toilet facilities, the population suffers from diseases and illnesses (such as kidney ailments, stones in the bladder etc), the GDP will drop, the productivity falls, and the economy will suffer too.



Contrary to popular belief toilets are not cost centres. They actually assist in generating profits. For example, shoppers with offsprings would normally choose to shop in buildings with child-safe toilets. Even the building space rental rates are influenced by the standard of toilet facilities. Occupants who are satisfied with the toilets in the building will be willing to renew or pay the rentals sought by the owners. It's a win-win situation for all parties.



Even in schools, children need to be able to ease themselves, and wash their hands for personal hygiene. The outbreak of any diseases in a school can have a catastrophic effect not to mention the public outcry. We would also like to start school programs to inculcate good Toilet Hygiene & Etiquette for young children.

Using toilets has become part of our lifestyle. We use them constantly in a day. A toilet can be used to gauge the level of social graciousness of a nation and its people. Toilet breaks are precious periods of rest which we are entitled to cherish and to enjoy, but not to suffer and endure with great reluctance.

A good toilet environment normally leads to better behaviour and ownership of the place. Trained designers, facility managers and maintenance crew ensure the sustainability of cleanliness, with a Code of Practice in place, and the results will be assured.



Though largely neglected in the past, the subject of Public Toilets has received much attention in the world media for the last five years. As Singapore enters 2004, we must learn to treat our toilets with greater care, to reduce our dread and increase our love for them; to accept and acknowledge that our daily bodily function is a natural process. It is as normal as eating, drinking and breathing. We now have the courage to proclaim that we are all toilet users. Just as other social taboos are fast fading, toilets too will disappear as the last taboo of the 21st century.

In the process, I'd hope everyone will be more vocal about the state of our public toilets and as the subject enters mainstream discussions, it'll inevitably generate a demand for better toilet facilities. Your efforts will bring about a happier toilet experience. Remember, ask and you shall be given.



I wish you all "Happy Toilets"!
Jack Sim, President, RAS

News Bites

a) Positive Development for Toilet Culture



Singapore - The spate of public discussions in the media is certainly a healthy sign that there is growing awareness of the need for well-designed and maintained toilets, but also the need for them to properly labeled. This augurs well for our society as we can only change the whole toilet culture in Singapore by having better toilet facilities, well-ventilated, odourless, and hygienically maintained.

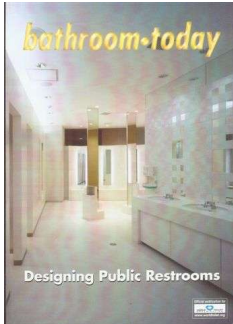
Developers & toilet owners can adopt the standards set by the American Institute for Graphic Arts (AIGA). Toilet symbols can be found at www.aiga.org. RAS comments were published on ChannelNewsAsia (12 Jan 2004), ZaoBao & New Paper (13 Jan 2004) and the Strait Times (14 Jan 2004).

b) World's Most Expensive Gold & Jewellery Washroom

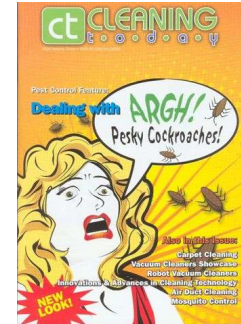


Hong Kong - You have seen it featured in the news. It is constructed with gold, natural precious gemstones and it works too! It has an air filtering system, automatic flushing, self-cleansing and forced-air dryer. This HK\$38 million washroom is located at G/F, 28 Man Lok Street, Hung Hom, Kowloon.

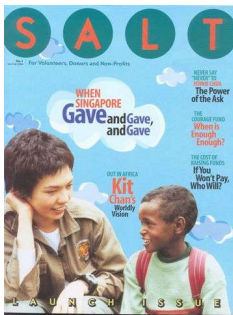
c) Complementary Trade Magazines



If you are a toilet owner, cleaning or building maintenance company, interior designer, architect, toilet and bathroom materials supplier, managing agent for a building etc. these two magazines can be yours, without charge. Please e-mail to info@toilet.org.sg or call 68411621 or fax to 68412891, and we will facilitate your application.



d) Launch of SALT, National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) magazine (*reproduced with permission; for more information, visit www.nvpc.org.sg*)



Singapore - The first issue was launched at the Old Parliament House by Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Community Development and Sports on 13 Jan 2004. The first magazine of its kind focused on the People Sector, reaching those who give of their time, money, in kind or in the many creative and satisfying ways people and organisations find to give of themselves. SALT is a bi-monthly magazine for people who give and receive. It spreads over volunteers, volunteer hosting organisations, donors and non-profits in Singapore.

International Volunteer Day 2003 was celebrated in 107 countries - Do something different...do something to change your lifestyle



December is a time of giving and charity. How appropriate that it was also International Volunteer's Day on 5th December. Back in 1985, to recognise the contributions of volunteers all around the world, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 5th December as International Volunteer Day (IVD).



From Afghanistan to Zambia, IVD 2003 was celebrated in 107 countries this year. Around the world, heads of state, diplomats, local officials along with friends and neighbours joined in the festivities to commemorate the event.

Volunteers worldwide celebrated the occasion by taking part in discussions on how volunteerism can be expanded in the private sector and having meetings with other fellow volunteers. They all belong to a fraternity that speaks one language, "in service to others for a better society".



In Singapore, volunteerism is alive and well. And the Restroom Association of Singapore (RAS) launched a drive to recruit volunteers with diverse skills to help in their cause. Candidates must have a passion and interest in bringing about to improve changes in the restroom environment. One programme is the Happy Toilet Programme (more later). Minister for the Environment Mr Lim Swee Say launched the programme at Tampines Mall back in 1 July 2003.

The RAS is also taking the cue Mr. Lim, who said on another occasion that more community involvement and less enforcement would be the way to go in keeping Singapore clean. *“The challenge is to do so through personal ownership and community commitment”*, said Mr Lim.

One such person is Mr Low Chuan Seng from Yio Chu Kang GRC – he chaired the SARS Taskforce. He has won over 12 coffee shops in his constituency to keep their toilets clean either by renovating them or providing more amenities. Mr Low is one of the 6, 200 volunteers in Singapore who works on improving cleanliness standards.

“...volunteering gives energy rather than drain energy. It’s true that time is finite, but it seems like by volunteering as a boss, your staff work better. Why? Boss has no time, so he empowers more to the staff. Staff uses their ideas more and the company progresses faster. Let’s face it, centralised control is not efficient. The boss does not know all...”

- Jack Sim, businessman; President and Founder of the RAS said in celebration of the Volunteer Month (December).

Post-SARS



Even though the first SARS outbreak ended, one must remain vigilant. Everyone should continue practicing personal hygiene. Needless to say, public toilets are where one should continue to wash their hands, and keep the toilet clean for the next user.

Community Development Councils’ Committees (CDC) have also invited the RAS to assist in establishing standards on clean public toilets. They also wanted RAS to work closely with them on researching the cultural differences amongst the different races in Singapore.



The RAS has also been invited by the Community Centres' Sub-committees for the Prevention of SARS to set hygiene standards; judge the cleanest toilets in their constituencies; hold Public Education Fairs with CDCs and CCs etc. Educating the general public at grassroots events is something that RAS wants to do as much as possible in 2004.

Working with Others

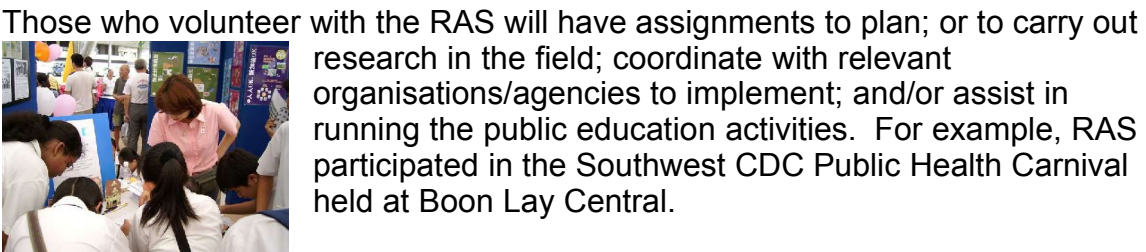


A few Volunteer Welfare Organisations have asked the RAS to engage building owners to have enough suitable toilets for our senior citizens e.g. outdoor facilities to hold Intergeneration Sports Day, hold enrichment talks on Cleaning Toilets and Maintaining them etc. RAS facilitated the provision of portable toilets, which was sponsored by ISS.

Volunteer Today with RAS



The toilet is a place where we spend a significant amount of time. It is everyone's duty to keep it clean and pleasant for all users. Educating the public on the importance of good toilet hygiene and etiquette lies in our hands. For example, volunteer with RAS if you like working with children, as RAS plans to launch Toilet Hygiene & Etiquette programs, targeted at young school students.



Those who volunteer with the RAS will have assignments to plan; or to carry out research in the field; coordinate with relevant organisations/agencies to implement; and/or assist in running the public education activities. For example, RAS participated in the Southwest CDC Public Health Carnival held at Boon Lay Central.

Volunteers can also help to operate RAS website (www.toilet.org.sg), which requires a Mandarin section. We also need writers for the monthly e-newsletters published by RAS, research writers to write and translate foreign language feature articles into English for publication.



Appreciation of clean & well-designed toilets is a trait that RAS is looking for volunteers for the task of Toilet Assessors. Under our Happy Toilet program, training will be given to volunteers on how to audit public toilets. Participants will learn all about the finer points of design, maintenance and aesthetics of a five-star Happy Toilet.

“You have done what you wanted to do and you have made a difference to other people’s lives. You can do a lot of things on your own and be satisfied but if you just do it for yourself, well, then it’s not quite complete.”

DPM Lee Hsien Loong, 2003, on his idea of a life well-lived.

If you are someone who wants to learn, is enthusiastic, has belief in the cause and have commitment, contact RAS today. Take up the challenges to change mindsets and perceptions, for what you do today will change society tomorrow! To change your life, please contact RAS at info@toilet.org.sg or call 68411621 today!

RAS acknowledges with appreciation for excerpts taken from www.worldvolunteerweb.org and www.nvpc.org.sg that are used in the above article.

One-liner that says all about your business

Singapore has been at the forefront in the push for cleaner and better designed toilets. Our strategy is to move the masses to demand from building owners and operators to provide them with toilets that are hygienic and pleasantly designed. In this way we promote a good toilet culture among the people.

We are considering a tagline to go along with our public education programme. Simple and to the point, the tagline says: “It’s Everybody’s Business!”

English:

"It's Everybody's Business!" has two meanings:

- a) Everyone has a duty to care for the toilet.
- b) Everybody needs to visit the toilet.

Mandarin:

"Ren Ren You Fen" has two meanings:

- a) Everyone has a duty to keep toilet clean.
- b) Everyone has to visit the toilet.

Malay:

"Perlaburan Untuk Semua" two meanings:

- a) An Investment by Everyone.
- b) A Deposit by Everyone.

Tamil:

"Suttham Sugam Tharum" one meaning:

- a) Cleanliness Brings Happiness.

Russian

Chistota - zalog zdorovya

- a) Clean means healthy

Perhaps you have other views that you may want to share with us. If so, we will like to hear from you as we want to get as many views as we can before we embark on our project. Thank you for your time and we look forward to your contribution.

If you are interested to help or know of available resources, or just have some comments regarding the above article, please drop us an e-mail at info@toilet.org.sg

Where Colour TV Is More Important Than Toilets

- An open letter to World Toilet Organisation

India - While there are many organizations in the world focusing on a variety of social issues in the developing world, there are few like yours, which discusses on the issue of clean toilets. I hope your organization grows and positively influence governments representing the developing countries such as India. With a sense of regret, I would like to share some of my disgusting experience with you based on my stay in a village called Kalambur based in Tamil Naidu, India.

In many villages of Tamil Naidu, where there is a degree of awareness, a large number of people don't have toilets at home though the same large numbers have colour-TVs. Buying a colour TV is doubly expensive than building a toilet!

It is surprising but annoying that even people, who do have toilets at home, prefer to squat outside in the paddy fields. There are many people who do have sufficient sum of money to build a toilet but they don't realize the need or necessity. For instance, there are people who construct concrete houses with a special room for prayer but they don't build a toilet at home.

Defecation is done in the open even the perimeter of the temples' walls is not spared. When the fecal matter dries up, it gets blown by the wind and the streets are littered with them. As you can imagine, later this spreads both by air and by foot.

The sense of cleanliness never crept in the mind of even educated class. This should be a part of the school curriculum. Here in India, almost all use water as a medium for cleaning instead of toilet papers. While I am not sure which is the best method to remove the remnants, the important point is no one uses soap to clean the hands after using the toilet. In villages, many people use the same but small pool of water to clean up repeatedly after defecation As a consequence a large number of people do get infection of various sorts. While the situation in villages is bad, in cities and towns it is worse. Any stranger who comes to India and travels by train would notice that.

In cluttered lower middle class townships, the toilet waste directly gets dumped to the drain where pigs make use of them. You can imagine what it is like during the rainy seasons. Even major establishments like public primary schools don't have toilets. One wonders culturally also, if the concept of cleanliness had crept in, to the society. For instance, those who do construct toilets at home also build a septic tank in their back yard. However, they are built with holes on the sides so

that the subsurface soil absorbs the fecal water in the septic tank. This will have devastating consequences as many places in India including rural interiors are fast depending on bore water. Many villagers don't have the habit of heating the water before drinking. As a consequence, with the tide of time diseases are bound to spread.

Though I am presenting a bleak picture, the situation would change if the Government acts through mass media. Just like rainwater harvesting which has been fairly successful, if the government has the initiative, the awareness will certainly percolate to the masses.

Community toilets are a major failure and a three-tier toilet system would help. Just like first class compartments in the trains, the three tier system could cater to the needs of higher middle class with a high fee, tier two for middle class with moderate fee and lower one targeting the poor which could be free. Correspondingly the toilets will be fancy for the first class and modest for the second and third class.

Your organization or another could help in setting up model toilets with recycling facility using locally available material. Also, you could have the design of a septic tank in your web site. I am not sure if the septic tanks built around my village are the correct ones. It is a big-cemented pit with holes on the side, which is directly exposed to the subsurface soil on the sides.

If you or another are in a position to financially help someone in India in building a toilet then, I would recommend building few toilets for the Ponnagar Primary School situated in my village. If someone from your organization would like to visit, Kalambur Village, I would be pleased to take them along. Please produce documentaries and also make recommendations to our governments. Make model toilets in villages or towns if possible and also make available information on low cost toilets on the web.

Thank you

Baskar

Baskar_cr@yahoo.com

These are personal views of Dr. Baskar. If you are interested to help or know of available resources, or just have some comments regarding the above article, please drop us an e-mail at info@toilet.org.sg

Metroped USA

www.metroped.org

Metroped is a privately funded not-for-profit Corporation - 'addressing public policy impediments to pedestrian fitness and transit in Metropolitan areas'

In our growing metropolitan areas, people who walk, bike, or exercise outside face risk and obstacle. Metroped is a Proponent and Information Organization for issues outside the scope of mainstream Fitness and Health Advocacy. We are

particularly concerned with public policy that, either by omission or intent, acts as an impediment to these activities.

The Public Restroom Initiative (<http://metroped.org/PRI/index.htm>)

The Public Restroom Initiative is intended as an information source for Advocates working to make life viable for the restroom challenged. These people are the small but significant percent of the population who suffer medical conditions that cause them to frequently need a restroom when away from home. These otherwise productive individuals are limited in their choice of work locations, in their participation in physical fitness activities, and to where and how they travel by the limited availability of public toilet facilities.

Of particular interest is the lack of United States Public Policy addressing the quality of life impediments for the Restroom Challenged. Current Law exists to protect the health of those who need to void when away from home, but regulations lack sufficient scope and authority to comprehensively address the need for toilets in all public areas.

Our goals include the increasing public awareness of the challenge of everyday life faced by those who the Wall Street Journal says 'suffer in silence'. Long term, we are fostering the development and implementation of better Public Health Directives to eliminate the gaps in existing Federal, State and Local toilet availability codes.

For more, please visit (<http://metroped.org/PRI/index.htm>)

Website Site Map

- ❑ Media coverage of Initiative
- ❑ Who are the 'Restroom Challenged' ?
- ❑ Problem Areas and Solutions
- ❑ Benefits to Society
- ❑ Existing Codes and Regulation
- ❑ General Support
- ❑ Restrooms in Public Space
- ❑ Restroom Advertising
- ❑ Self Cleaning Public Toilets APT's
- ❑ Municipal Parking Restrooms
- ❑ Bicycle Commuters
- ❑ Help for the Duress Challenged
- ❑ Fighting Back when denied access

The 'restroom challenged' occasionally have an urgent need to use a restroom less than an hour after departing. Shopping, visiting, or commuting to work is an ordeal. Fortunately, indoor Malls, major retailers, and 'most' public transits systems have public restrooms....

Medical studies show the importance of regular urination, with women generally needing to void more frequently than men. Adverse health effects that may result from voluntary urinary retention include increased frequency of urinary tract infections (UTIs), which can lead to more serious infections and, in rare situations, renal damage.....

Find out more at..... <http://www.metrofed.org/PRI/Who.htm>