

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY MS TAN PUAY HOON, PRESIDENT OF THE RESTROOM ASSOCIATION (SINGAPORE) (RAS) AT THE SINGAPORE WASH (WATER, SANITATION & HYGIENE) CONFERENCE 2013 ON WORLD TOILET DAY, 19 NOV 2013, 9.00AM, AT THE TAMPINES REGIONAL LIBRARY AUDITORIUM**

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A very good morning to:

Our Guest of Honour Ms Grace Fu, Minister of Prime Minister's Office, also Second Minister for the Environment and Water Resources and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs

LOO (Let's Observe Ourselves) Awards recipients, conference speakers, supporters and distinguished guests

It is our pleasure and honour to welcome all of you to the first Singapore Water, Sanitation & Hygiene or WASH Conference 2013 on World Toilet Day. Last year at the LOO Carnival & Awards, Guest of Honour Mr Liat Teng Lit, Chairman of the Public Hygiene Council, proposed to us that the LOO Awards should be heightened and organised at a larger scale. We accepted his proposal and we are heartened that we are able to implement his suggestion this year, as we hold the fifth LOO Awards, in conjunction with the WASH Conference, to commemorate World Toilet Day. We wish to first extend our heartiest congratulations to all award recipients for your exemplary contributions of uplifting the local restroom standards, especially the cleaning attendants. We are pleased to announce that a record of 10 cleaning attendants, as compared to 3 every year, is selected to receive an award and grocery vouchers this year.

Committed cleaning attendants underscore the sustainability of restroom cleanliness. Yet, it is regrettable that their contributions continue to go unnoticed. Therefore, apart from organising the LOO Awards, our key message for the World Toilet Day this year is “Ignite a SPARK – Share, Promote & Adopt Restroom Kindness”. As RAS ignites this SPARK, we hope everyone can join us to burn an eternal flame of restroom kindness towards cleaning attendants, fellow users and 2.5 billion people around the world still without a toilet. We believe restroom kindness or graciousness should be displayed by everyone. Owners and operators should be gracious to provide working facilities. Cleaning service providers should be gracious to look into welfare of cleaning attendants and public users should be gracious to cleaning attendants and fellow users.

### **A Gracious Society Embracing Excellence in Restroom Culture**

Today, our vision is “A Gracious Society Embracing Excellence in Restroom Culture”. This is achieved through our current **four-pronged approach** which is:

Firstly, encouraging owners to provide quality restrooms

Next, lobbying the cleaning industry to meet the right standards

Then, educating socially responsible users

And, recognising organisations and individuals for their contributions

## **Key Milestones and Activities**

We wish to make use of this opportunity to share some of our key milestones and future plans. In 2001, we became one of the founding members of the World Toilet Organization or WTO, and declared 19 November as World Toilet Day together with 16 other toilet associations.

### **1. Happy Toilet Programme**

In 2003 during the SARS period, we launched the Happy Toilet Programme or HTP. HTP is now a nationwide, recognised toilet-rating system, which is strongly supported by the National Environment Agency or NEA.

### **2. Preschool and School Education Programmes**

The Happy Toilet School Education Programme or HTSE for primary and secondary schools was introduced in 2005 and a similar programme for preschools was launched in 2007. In 2011, a new holistic school programme called the Sustaining Toilets As Restrooms or STAR Awards Programme was launched to replace the HTSE. Today, we have reached out to more than 200 schools, kindergartens and preschools. We strongly believe that good restroom etiquette should be cultivated at a young age. In 2011, we also collaborated with 6 ITEs for the first time. A 3-year campaign was also launched at the ITE College East. Its campaign is titled as +ACT which stands for Positive Action for the Care of Toilets.

### **3. Inter Agency Working Committee**

In 2008, we formed an Inter Agency Working Committee or IAWC, with close to 30 government agencies, Community Development Councils (CDCs), Town

Councils, private associations and companies. We consolidated the details and submitted a report to the Prime Minister in 2010.

#### **4. Eco-Assessor Programme**

In the same year, we launched the Eco-Assessor Programme to train and hire lower-income housewives and retirees, to certify toilets under the Happy Toilet Programme. The Eco-Assessors were introduced at the LOO Campaign on World Toilet Day in 2008.

#### **5. LOO Campaign, Carnival and Awards**

The LOO Campaign is another milestone of working on the four-pronged approach, which is now our mission statement to target owners, operators, cleaning companies, cleaning attendants and public users to play their part. The word play of "LOO", which was not the colloquial term for a restroom, in fact stood for "Let's Observe Ourselves". One year after the launch of our LOO Campaign, we initiated the LOO Awards to recognise organisations and individuals for their contributions. In 2010, we incorporated the LOO Awards with the LOO Carnival, which was organised at the National Library to raise public awareness. Prior to the carnival at the National Library, educational exhibits on Singapore's sanitation history were also displayed at seven regional libraries. Though the LOO Awards are not presented at the LOO Carnival this year, we managed to hold LOO Carnivals at five shopping malls island wide for the first time. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to HDB for sponsoring its venues for our carnival.

## **6. Leveraging on Social Media**

With the proliferation of social media platforms, we have been leveraging on them to reach out to the masses, not only by creating Facebook and Twitter pages, but also uploading captivating educational videos to YouTube. Another platform called the LOO Connect, which was developed by the Singapore Land Authority (SLA), was launched on our website last year and mobile Android version of the LOO Connect was launched in May this year. The LOO Connect allows the public to locate Happy Toilets and, also acts as a feedback channel, for the public to provide comments, by either adding new locations, or posting comments on existing locations.

Last year, students from Nanyang Polytechnic's School of Interactive & Digital Media, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility or CSR initiative, helped to develop LOO Whiz, our first online game. This game is a good representation of actual restroom cleaning, which helps to instil considerate user behaviour. Gamers get to experience the demanding work of a restroom attendant due to poor user behaviour. This game educates the public in a subtle manner, to better appreciate the efforts of the restroom attendants by acting responsibly. All these platforms are essential means of engaging the public to talk about toilets. We hope the crucial subject of toilets can shed its taboo image and become a widely-discussed topic.

### **Future Plans**

This year is our 15th year. We are pleased to share with you that we have already set our sights ahead on the next three years.

## **1. One-Stop Solution Provider**

We wish to evolve into a one-stop solution provider by linking owners, operators and cleaning service providers to credible partners, which offer effective products and solutions on toilet design, operations or maintenance. Two months ago, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding or MOU with Infinergy Systems Solutions. They are our first partner that can offer innovative IT solutions such as an electronic feedback system. Two subsequent MOUs will be signed later with BusAds and Nicae Trading & Industrial Supplies. BusAds offer odour reduction solutions by applying wall-covering materials which can efficiently trap and neutralise odours. The material is stain resistant and long lasting. Moreover, it can be applied to toilets with wallpaper decorations.

Nicae offers Nano Formula products from Europe, acting as a shield sealant that provides a layer of protective coating. This translates to easier cleaning and maintenance. Unlike other products, these DIY products can be applied effortlessly by anyone following proper instructions. We hope their products will breathe new life to public toilets in Singapore.

## **2. Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO)**

Though we observe ourselves as a one-stop restroom solution provider, we also seek to rebrand ourselves as a Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO) addressing human-welfare issues. This year, we successfully applied to the National Council of Social Service or NCSS as an Associate Member after amending our Constitution, to include our mission of helping the lower-income group and the disadvantaged. We stay committed in helping this group with our Eco-Assessor Programme and LOO Awards. A new kindness project was also introduced this year as part of our STAR Awards Programme to encourage

schools to organise activities to appreciate the efforts of cleaning attendants. Moving forward, in the next three years, we are planning to provide social assistance to cleaning attendants. For a start, we will need to first send our existing employees to undergo training as social workers. Since our existing programmes require us to interact with cleaning attendants, we believe that we can reach out to them more effectively without having them to approach us.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, at the WASH Conference, which is also our key milestone this year, we would like to once again thank our Guest of Honour Ms Grace Fu, award recipients, venue sponsor Tampines Regional Library, conference speakers, supporters and distinguished guests. This event would not have been possible without your support. We believe with your continued support, we can all work together towards becoming a more gracious society, embracing excellence in restroom culture.

Thank you.