



A common but unfortunate sight in public loos – the cubicle is often strewn with toilet paper – on the floor, the toilet seat and the bin for used sanitary towels.

Good toilets, bad habits

Some of the public restrooms here are pretty nice – till the public gets to them

■ BY KIMBERLY SPYKERMAN

THE malls here have really great toilets.

Those in Ngee Ann City, for instance, are well-lit and have full-length mirrors; Paragon Shopping Centre's toilets have automatic sliding doors – a no-need-to-touch feature that is every germ-fearing person's dream.

But providing these gems of toilets might as well be an exercise in casting pearls before swine.

Filth in utilitarian toilets at hawker centres and bus interchanges is nothing new, but a Straits Times check showed that even the plants, gleaming counter tops and shiny mirrors in more upscale loos do little to inspire better toilet habits.

Mr Sebastian Sekaran, a 42-year-old logistics executive, told The Straits Times: "It's people's mindsets that have to be changed. So what if the toilets look good? It also won't matter how often the toilets are cleaned if people still make a mess."

He added: "People know it's not their toilet, so they don't feel like the onus is on them to keep it clean."

The toilets in Far East Plaza and Lucky Plaza went through major overhauls in 2005 as part of the two malls' move to buff their image among shoppers, but the toilets are still not clean.

A check by this reporter found many porcelain bowls plastered with wet toilet paper. Floors and toilet seats were spattered with urine, and used sanitary towels sat atop the lidded bins provided precisely to keep them out of sight.

In the toilets for "gents", soiled floors around the urinals could be seen.

An exasperated Teo Yong Kiang, 48, a hairstylist in Far East Plaza, made this call: "Guys, please aim properly!"

Mr Wong Chee Meng, 47, who cleans the toilets at Paragon Shopping Centre, said globs of soggy toilet paper in the urinals are his biggest bugbear: "I have to pick them out before they clog up the urinal and we have to call the plumber."

For Madam Sapariah Kasmadi, 54, a cleaner in Ngee Ann City's toilets, picking up soiled toilet paper is also a daily task.



She said: "Of course I don't like it but that's my job. It would be nice if people could be a bit more considerate."

She makes half-hourly forays into the toilet to clean the cubicles, wipe the dripping counter tops and check that everything is in working order.

Weekends are the worst because of the bigger crowds.

Mr Yoges Arumugam, 19, who also works on Ngee Ann City's toilets, has had to clean faeces off the floor more than a few times.

He said: "I don't know why they do this. It makes the whole toilet so smelly."

But despite their unhappiness over the lack of toilet etiquette

here, the cleaners know there is little they can do but get on with the cleaning. Mr Yoges said the management would come down on them if the very people using the toilets complain about their being dirty.

Madam He Ai Ni, 60, who cleans the toilets in Changi Airport, said: "Our job as cleaners is just to make sure that whenever someone makes a mess, we take care of the situation at once."

Sales assistant Caroline Shing, 23, pointed out that people are less inclined to keep toilets clean if they have already been soiled by previous users.

Of footprints left on toilet seats, she said: "It's a vicious cycle. If a seat is already dirty, people won't want to sit on it. They'd probably just step on it."

Smoking in the toilets is banned, but it still happens. Aside from leaving behind the odour of smoke, culprits also stub out their cigarettes on toilet roll dispensers, leaving them pocked with scorch marks and ash-littered.

For all the mess they put up with, cleaners seldom get a word of thanks; users seek them out only when there are problems with the toilets.

But Mr Yoges said tourists are more generous with praise. He said he was once tipped \$5 by an Australian visitor who relieved her churning stomach. She apologised for the mess as well.

The Restroom Association of Singapore has declared its target of making seven in 10 public toilets here clean by 2010 through public education.

Its president Tan Puay Hoon said that though well-designed and decorated loos have definitely become cleaner, toilet habits here need an attitude overhaul:

"We believe continued emphasis on good toilet habits by toilet operators will pay off eventually."

kimspsyke@sph.com.sg

Additional reporting by Seow Kai Lun

Do you think S'poreans are gracious? Vote online at www.straitstimes.com



The trash container is often overflowing with paper. ST PHOTOS: DANIEL CHIN

What the toilets say about the public

"It irks me when mothers take their kids into the same cubicles. They take a really long time, and the kids tend to mess up the cubicles. There's always lots of toilet paper on the floor and the seat will be dirty. The counter top ends up wet when parents carry their kids up to wash their hands. All toilets should be equipped with kiddy cubicles."

Ms Xie Minhui, 35, a director of communications in a luxury hotel here. For her, Great World City's toilets are the best

"Toilets here always seem wet and dirty, especially the sinks. People have a habit of splashing water all over when they wash their hands. There's no way I can put my bag down anywhere!"

Mrs Lorna Ong, 52, a homemaker, who says Changi Airport has the cleanest toilets here

"It's horrible when people don't flush the toilet, leaving a 'surprise' behind for the next person

who lifts the lid."

Financial consultant Eddy Sng, 25, one among many who name Paragon Shopping Centre as having the best toilets

"People who don't wash their hands after using the toilet - now that's a really bad habit!"

Homemaker Angela Wong, 44, who also credits Changi Airport with having the most appealing toilets

"It's disgusting when people throw toilet paper into urinals. The whole urinal becomes clogged and it both looks and smells unpleasant."

Teacher Gabriel Lim, 48, for whom the toilets at Plaza Singapura are the best

"The toilets here are usually clean and well taken care of. The cleaners here do a great job! And we don't even need to pay to use these decent toilets, which is not the case back home."

Engineer Jurgen Kloof, 27, a Dutchman who comes to Singapore twice a year