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Dirty loos: Fine the operators, educate the users

I AGREE with the sentiments of the writer of "Shameful state of our loos spreads to malls" on Saturday.

As a former environmental health officer, I feel that the general standard of hygiene of our public toilets, not only in the malls, but more importantly in HDB housing estates where 90 per cent of citizens live, is a cause for concern.

The general defects that I have observed in the toilets of eating establishments in HDB estates are a strong stench, dirty and wet floors, sanitary fittings not in good working order, absence of soap and toilet paper, and non-functioning hand-dryers.

All this persists despite the fact that the National Environment Agency (NEA) had spent, according to the NEA website, \$4 million in the Toilet Upgrading Programme to help our coffee shops to upgrade their toilets five years ago under the "Singapore's OK" campaign for clean public toilets.

My conclusion is that the responsibility for the present unsatisfactory state of affairs lies not so much with the NEA, but primarily with the users and the licensees/operators of the toilets.

The former generally do not observe proper usage norms such as flushing the urinals/water closets after use, and the latter fail to ensure proper maintenance and frequent cleaning of the toilets.

Without the collective effort and commitment of all concerned, our public toilets will forever be a disgrace to Singapore as a First World country.

From my experience, I would suggest two things: sustained enforcement and heavier fines including suspension of licences of the licensees/operators for failing to ensure proper maintenance and cleaning; and public education on a national scale for public toilet users through the mass media.

It is high time to do all of these.

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