

Clean toilets: NEA must do more

I REFER to the letter written by Mr S. Satish Appoo, Director of the Environmental Health Department at National Environment Agency (NEA), last Wednesday, "Clean toilets: Cooperation needed from all".

I could not agree more that both users and public toilet operators have an important role to play in keeping our public toilets clean and functional. Attitude plays an important part as users must treat these amenities as their own and operators must maintain these toilets by regular cleaning, ensuring that it is functional and provide hand soap and toilet paper.

For this to succeed it is also imperative that NEA must have a robust inspection and enforcement regime in place. Relying on the occasional public feedback and complaints is not an effective way of ensuring that regulations are complied with.

The fact that nine out of 10 coffee shop toilets are without toilet paper and hand soap is a glaring testimony that much needs to be done by the NEA. Also it is very obvious that token fines are not having the desired

effect. Perhaps, suspending the operating licence of the offending premises may have the desired deterrent effect.

The Code of Practice on Environmental Health also needs revision. Very often one sees only two cubicles in large and busy coffee shops. It is not possible to maintain hygiene standards when there is a constant stream of users all day. There should be at least two more cubicles so that cleaning and maintenance can be carried out without depriving anyone of using the facilities. Ideally, the seating capacity of the premises should be a factor in deciding the number of toilet cubicles/urinals.

In some European countries, toilet facilities are never allowed within premises where food is prepared and served. They are built nearby instead and immaculately kept. Here in Singapore, one often sees food being displayed next to toilets.

In my opinion, we have a long way to go and NEA must set new standards. The state of our public toilets is shameful, to say the least.

Roland Soh
