



Raising the bar for a classy loo



Clean wash basins (left) and plants have given PLUS toilets at the Pagoh rest area a touch of aesthetics. Pictures by Nurul Shafina Jemenon



A cleaner mops the floor regularly to ensure that the toilet facilities at PLUS' Pagoh rest area in Johor are always dry.

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PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia is one of the few countries in the world with standards for public toilets, yet many have turned their noses up at them. The take-up rate for the standards, developed in 2006 by the Department of Standards Malaysia, has been disappointingly low.

The department's director-general, Fadilah Baharin, said only PLUS Expressways Bhd and one school, Sekolah Kebangsaan Perbandaran Sibn in Sarawak, use the standards.

Even the "luxury" toilets in shopping complexes do not comply with the standards.

Fadilah said it was a shame that the standards are not taken seriously when people visit the toilets a minimum six times a day.

It's more than shame. It's of public health concern actually.

Associate Professor Dr Asiah Abdul Halim of the International Islamic University Malaysia's Faculty of Architecture and Environmental Design noted: "The door knob

of a public toilet is the dirtiest place as some people do not wash their hands after using the toilet."

It's not like decision makers and others are not aware of this dirty fact.

Sadly, as Fadilah said, "the take-up rate has been very low among government departments as well as the private sector."

There are four parts to the standards called the MS2015:

Part I: When you build a toilet, there must be minimum design requirements that cater for the needs of all, including the disabled, senior citizens and children.

Part II: This is the inspection criterion that relates to the standard of this operating procedure.

Part III: The rating criteria for the bathroom and building interior.

Part IV: This specifies the code of practice for cleaning.

"Part III is like what we have in restaurants where Grade A is the cleanest, followed by

Grade B, etc," said Fadilah.

"Part IV is where building operators specify what the cleaners should do to comply with Part II. Otherwise the cleaners will just do whatever they want to do."

Khalilah Mohd Talha, PLUS general manager of corporate communications, said the company used the standards as it wanted to provide the best for its motorists.

"Their convenience and safety is our utmost priority," she said.

Asiah, who was chairman of the standards committee, said Malaysia was the only Muslim country in the world to have standards for toilets in accordance with Islamic specifications.

"What makes our standards special is that we allow a larger space for the water closet so that there is enough room to comfortably close the door."

"There is also space for women to place their handbags and hooks for men to hang their belongings."

Architects and designers should refer to the standards as it also caters for the abatement requirements of wheelchair users."

The standards, Asiah said, allowed for architects to choose different specifications for different types of toilets.

"My main objective was to improve the design of the toilets. Some of our toilets are too small. You can't even close the

handles and not knobs as some people are not strong enough to turn them. A lever can be pushed down with your elbow."

"There should be railings for senior citizens, the disabled and the overweight to help them get up after using the toilet."

Files should have texture and not be smooth."

The designs also took into account child-users.

Asiah said users needed to be



Fadilah Baharin is disappointed that the take-up rate in the government and private sectors is very low



Khalilah Mohd Talha says PLUS has adopted the toilet standards at its rest areas along the North-South Expressway

door without first sitting on the water closet.

"So we put the space issue into the standards. We also provide designs for the hose so that it does not touch the ground first though up."

"As an architect, I found that corner sinks are better if there are no joints as dirt accumulates at the joints."

"Doors should have lever

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Dr Asiah Abdul Rahim International Islamic University Malaysia's Faculty of Architecture and Environmental Design

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A nappy change cubicle is provided for mothers travelling with babies in the women's toilet area at the Pagoh rest area in Johor.

TOILET DAY

WORLD Toilet Day was first celebrated on Nov 19, 2001 by the World Toilet Organisation. It has since been celebrated annually to increase awareness of the importance of toilet sanitation and the toilet users' rights for a better toilet environment.

The theme for this year is "The Health of Your Child Begins in the Toilet".

lets that were functional, safe and comfortable.

"Toilets should not be looked upon as a dirty place."

"Toilets must be designed in such a way that it minimises the need for you to touch anything, said Asiah.

"We even found a lot of germs on the knob of the tap in the wash basin.

"So automatic taps with sensors are more appropriate for public toilets."

Asiah urged architects to use the standards and design good public toilets at jetties, bus terminals, waterfront developments, children's recreational areas, schools, mosques and other places of worship, and business centres.

The standards were developed following a report presented by several Japanese students to the then prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 2001.



Dr Asiah Abdul Rahim showing the design of the hose which does not touch the ground in a toilet at the International Islamic University.

Damascus University use area and make recommendations based on our standards."

Added Fadilah, "If Syria can acknowledge our standards, why can't Malaysia?"

■ Do you think our public toilets stink? Send your comments and feedback to nsun@nt.com.my