

They install turnstiles to turn her out

Toilet auntie who refused to leave Jurong East market after dispute might be forced to move

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THE unyielding toilet auntie has lost her fight.

Come 1 Jun, she will be replaced by turnstiles which will be used for entry into the toilets of Yuhua Place food centre and wet market in Block 347, Jurong East Avenue 1.

The 68-year-old long-time toilet caretaker, Madam Wong Pit Wan, will now have no choice but to leave.

In March, she refused to resign after a dispute with a management committee official. She continued to turn up for work and forced a re-think among committee members, some of whom were sympathetic to her plight.

Now, as then, she insists that she has done no wrong.

"They are forcing me to leave by installing the turnstiles," said Madam Wong in Mandarin.

The New Paper reported her story on 12 Mar. Then, Madam Wong was told to quit by a treasurer of the management committee which makes decisions on behalf of the merchants' association at Yuhua Place.

She was initially told to leave by December last year, but she held on and the committee relented by allowing her to stay till the end of this month.

At the time, Madam Wong told The New Paper that she would continue to turn up for work - just as she has done for the past 24 years - and collect money from toilet users, even if it meant that she would stop getting paid for cleaning the toilets.

Out of the \$800 she receives a month, she gets less than \$300 from her 10-cents collection.

Madam Wong, a divorcee, lives in a rented room, which she shares with a friend, near the market. Despite having three grown-up children, she does not depend on them for financial support.

When The New Paper spoke to her yesterday, she said she heard about the plan to install the turnstiles about one to two months ago.

"Someone came twice to take measurements (for the turnstiles), including once yesterday," she said.

Hoping

Even so, the old lady still hopes that the plan will not be implemented.

She said: "If they install it, I'll leave as I can't collect money anymore. Otherwise, I'll continue to stay."

She turned down a job transfer offer from the management committee to work at another location near Jurong East MRT.

She claimed that even though the new job has shorter working hours than her current job, it would require her to clean more toilets, spread over four floors, for less pay.

She said: "The salary is \$700 which is even less than the \$750 that those cleaning the tables here get."

"The toilets here are also dirty and stuffy. How am I going to clean so many toilets? I'll just have to look for another job myself."

Given her age and the economic situation, she is worried that she may not be able to find another job.

She replied: "I'll worry about it when it comes. The Government asked old people to continue working while they can, but now they are doing this to me."

"What about compensation? I've worked here for 24 years. How can they expect me to just leave when they ask me to?"

'If I leave my job, it means I'm guilty'

Tired in December over 'rains' accident, Jurong toilet cleaner still turns up for work daily

Madam Wong, 68, has been cleaning the toilets at Yuhua Place food centre and wet market in Block 347, Jurong East Avenue 1, for 24 years. She was initially told to leave by December last year, but she held on and the management committee relented by allowing her to stay till the end of this month. She was told to quit by a treasurer of the management committee which makes decisions on behalf of the merchants' association at Yuhua Place. She was initially told to leave by December last year, but she held on and the committee relented by allowing her to stay till the end of this month.

THE NEW PAPER, 12 MAR



TNP PICTURE:
MOHD ISHAK

"If they install it (the turnstiles), I'll leave as I can't collect money anymore. Otherwise, I'll continue to stay."

- Madam Wong (above), who rejected an offer to clean the toilets at another location near Jurong East MRT station.

When The New Paper contacted the Yuhua Place management committee, we were told that a new management committee has been in charge since last month.

The New Paper understands that the treasurer, who Madam Wong claimed she had a dispute with, is also in the new committee, but now holds a different position.

The new chairman of the committee, who only wanted to be known as Madam Ngai, said the decision to upgrade to an automated turnstile system was made by the merchants' association in March.

She claimed that the main reason for doing so was to prevent complaints and to reduce friction among workers.

When asked who is responsible for installing the turnstiles, she would only say it's an internal matter.

She also did not know how much it would cost to install the turnstiles.

"The issue has already been resolved," said Madam Ngai in Mandarin.

With the installation of the turnstiles, the toilet saga may have ended for the committee. But for Madam Wong, it means the beginning of a job hunt that is likely to be long and difficult.