

'Opt for Happy Toilets'

Letter from Emerson Hee

Project Executive, Restroom Association (S'pore)

ON APRIL 9, in response to the food poisoning incident at Geylang Serai, Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan commented that the current cleanliness standard is unacceptable as compared to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Sars) period in 2003 when the standard was very good. He quoted the example of the Toilet OK campaign launched during the Sars period when the toilets were "OK" but they are no longer so.

Our association concurs strongly with Mr Khaw's comments especially on the deteriorating standard of public toilets. Riding on the heightened awareness of public hygiene during the Sars period, we launched the Happy Toilet Programme (HTP) in June 2003 to complement the Toilet OK campaign. After about five years, we conducted a survey last year and only 26 per cent of the survey respondents indicated that the toilets are "OK".

Our survey also revealed that 84 per cent stated that dirty toilets are one of the reasons for not visiting the premises and 70 per cent opined that irresponsible users are the cause of dirty toilets. We will continue to conduct the survey

every year to compare and study the data.

With the deteriorating standard of public toilets, we launched the LOO Campaign last year. For the past one year before the launch of the campaign, about 170 toilets had been certified Happy Toilets. Some locations of these Happy Toilets are hawker centres, petrol stations, restaurants, shopping centres, tourist attractions, factories and hospitals. After the launch of the campaign, about 120 toilets have been certified Happy Toilets – including three coffeeshops within walking distance in Woodlands – with about 50 more toilets to be assessed and awarded in the next two months. Locations of these toilets are hawker centres, petrol stations, coffeeshops and shopping centres.

In conjunction with the LOO Campaign, we revamped the HTP grading system to include satisfaction – satisfied toilet visitors – to ensure a pleasant experience for the toilet users.

Therefore, we wish to appeal to the public to support our HTP by opting to only visit Happy Toilets. Though cleanliness of public toilets remain a challenge, public awareness of personal hygiene has been heightened through this food poisoning incident with some demanding clean public toilets not only for themselves but also stallholders preparing the food. Therefore, we strongly urge the public to start practising good toilet etiquette from home to public places so as to prevent a similar tragedy from happening again in the future.