

Can't stand this? CALL THE TOILET POLICE



◆ Don't just gripe about filthy loos, like this one in a Geylang petrol station. Call or e-mail the toilet police with the specific address.

Pictures: KELVIN CHNG

THE scene, the stench, the mess is often an assault on our senses. But who are you going to call? We're talking filthy toilets because of inconsiderate users, a situation that remains a stain on Singapore's first-world status.

You don't have to grimace and bear it; just call the toilet police. Although there has been progress in recent years in cleaning up the majority of Singapore's many public lavatories, there can be no rest for the good people of the Restroom Association of Singapore, the country's unofficial toilet police.

The association, with the help of the public, identifies and disinfects some of the nation's dirtiest restrooms. Once notified via its hotline or e-mail, the association swings into action and will inform the owner of the toilet to clean up or find himself reported to the National Environment Agency (NEA).

It has more than 20 volunteers who feel strongly about the cleanliness of public toilets here. They range from secondary school students to a 60-year-old.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Ms Tan Puay Hoon, 43, president of the Restroom Association of Singapore, said: "Although the public toilets in Singapore have improved over the past two to three years, you still come across reports of bad toilets. "Most of these are coffee-shop toilets that still lag behind the relatively well-maintained toilets at marketplaces and food centres."

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Following a tip-off, The New Paper did a little checking and uncovered a real nightmare-maker at the back of a petrol station along Geylang Road (above).

Unfortunately, such horrors often go unreported as the public may be unaware of who will address the problem, or they don't give detailed reports. Ms Tan said that in the last two months, she has seen more than 10 complaints of dirty toilets in the newspapers.

"Most people don't know where to go when they come across a dirty toilet, so they just write into forums.

"Those who have come across our website leave their complaints on it, but they never leave particulars like the exact location of the toilet for us to take any action."

Ms Tan urged the public to give the exact location when reporting mismanaged toilets.

But she added that people should bear in mind that the dirty toilet may just be a momentary lapse in cleanliness.

"Sometimes, a particular toilet may not have been cleaned or the previous user may not have used it properly. This is different from a toilet that is constantly dirty."

A toilet cleaner at the poorly managed toilet The New Paper came across agreed, saying that it was "impossible" to keep a toilet clean throughout the day unless users are more considerate.

"We try and clean the toilet as many times as possible, but people keep using it and it becomes difficult to always keep it clean."

He said that about 150 people used that toilet in Geylang every day.

"People from this petrol station and from the neighbourhood coffee shops use this."

Ms Tan said that a three-pronged approach should be adopted to maintain the sanitation standards of public toilets.

"Users should use toilets hygienically, cleaners should clean them well and the design of the toilet should also be improved."

In designing toilets, Ms Tan said that the wash basin, the hand dryer and towel dispenser should all be located close to each other.

"Otherwise, people need to walk from one place to another to dry their hands after washing and the water from their wet hands falls on to the floor."

The association plans to launch a public education programme to teach people toilet etiquette next year.

Till then, it encourages users with complaints on dirty toilets to write in online at www.toilet.org.sg or call 6297-9824 from 9am to 5pm on weekdays.

- Megha Gupta, newsroom intern