

Toilets hit by duct tape in Olympiambush marketing crackdown

THE fight against ambush marketing at the Beijing Games has taken the International Olympic Committee into bathroom stalls.

Brands of fixtures and fittings that aren't made by official sponsors, including toilet bowls and paper dispensers, are covered by grey tape at venues. Daily patrols are dispatched to ensure they stay that way, Mr Gerhard Heiberg, chairman of IOC marketing commission, said in an interview.

"We've been very strict on this.

We want to stress: No advertising. It's a good tradition; we protect the companies that are involved."

The committee's 12 international sponsors, including General Electric and Johnson & Johnson, paid an average of US\$72 million (\$102 million) for rights to use the five-ringed logo in advertising in the four years up to and including the Beijing Games.

Keeping other companies from tapping the appeal of the Olympics is part of the IOC's drive to maintain

sponsorships that account for more than 15 per cent of revenue.

With 37 venues, it's not always easy to prevent a corporate logo poking out where it shouldn't.

Branding of toilet seats from Toto and bowls from American Standard are a challenge to keep covered with tape that loses its grip in moist conditions.

Those companies are hardly seeking a competitive advantage, said Ms Kim Skildum-Reid, who heads Power Sponsorships in

Sydney and advises on ambush marketing. "Putting tapes over the logos is about assuaging sponsors' little tantrums, not about actually protecting a brand," she added.

Outside the venues, the push against companies using the Olympic trademarks without permission was faring better than expected, Mr Heiberg said.

At the torch relay before the Games, even sponsors were advertising in places they shouldn't have been, he said. BLOOMBERG