

Sensor taps here to stay

Despite grouses, sensor taps can shave off up to 30 per cent in water costs for mall owners

Jocelyn Lee

It is a common scene in public loos: People waving their hands below, above and around the tap to make the sensor inside spout water so they can wash their hands.

Despite being supposedly easy to use, many people using loos at malls and other places experience difficulty using sensor taps – which, over time, have replaced the old turn-on taps as they are believed to be more hygienic and cost-efficient as less water is wasted.

Some complain that the sensor taps do not spout water at all, and others say that while there is water, the flow is too feeble or too short-lived to clean their hands properly.

Cook Andy Lal, 30, says: "The taps at Raffles City Shopping Centre are not good because there's too little water flowing out. I have to wait for the water to flow out about three to four times before my hands are clean."

Mr Adrian Tan, 25, who is unemployed, agrees, saying: "The taps at VivoCity's toilets are not very good. I get very irritated because I have to move from one tap to another before I can get one that works."

However, there is a trick to using the sensor taps.

Users tend to wave or shake their hands directly under the nozzles, but this is wrong. They need to put their hands in

the basin, in front of the tap's neck.

Engineer Derrick Lee, 46, who works for Rigel, a local company which specialises in sensor technology, says: "The taps will not sense anything if you place your hands directly under the nozzle, as the sensors are usually at the neck of the taps."

As for the strength of water flow and how long it spouts forth, LifeStyle tested several taps and found that some taps such as those at Junction 8 and Plaza Singapura malls maintain a good, strong water flow. However, others such as those at The Centrepoint spurt water at two-second intervals.

Mr Lee notes that the cut-off feature of sensor taps – in which the water stops after a period of time – was introduced to prevent wastage of water.

He says: "By allowing the water flow to cut off automatically, shopping centres can save water by up to 30 per cent."

Indeed, many shopping malls told LifeStyle that they switched from the old turn-on taps to sensor ones as they are more hygienic – users do not touch a tap which someone else has already left germs on – and help to save water.

A VivoCity spokesman says: "Compared to conventional ones, motion sensor taps are more user-friendly, and the key is in conserving our water resources."

She declines to give figures but says: "We have had savings from using motion sensor taps in terms of both maintenance and water bills."

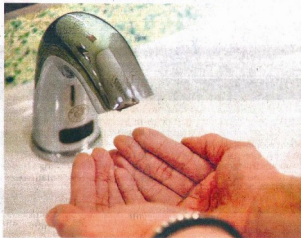
A spokesman for property developer CapitaLand, which owns 15 shopping malls here, also did not give figures but agreed, saying: "We have seen a drop in water consumption in terms of cubic metres after we installed the new sensor tap for Junction 8 and Plaza Singapura."

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Cook Andy Lal on sensor taps at Raffles City Shopping Centre



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A message at a faulty sink at Ngee Ann City (above) cautions mall patrons against using its sensor tap. Although the public have been seeing red over sensor taps that do not work, mall owners say they save money after switching to the automatic models.

She added: "They are also more hygienic as users need not have direct contact with the taps."

Engineer Mr Lee adds another advantage to the new sensor tap: "It also keeps the area cleaner and drier as users do not need to touch the tap, and do not splash water over its neck."

For those reasons, some people prefer using sensor taps.

Sandy Lim, a 19-year-old student, says: "I may take a longer time to wash my hands now, but at least I don't have to touch the taps, which makes my hands cleaner."

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