

Target: 7 in 10 public loos to be 'Happy Toilets'

BY ANG YIYING
& KIMBERLY SPYKERMAN

THE next time you step into a public loo, you may see "toilet checkers" at work, peering into toilet bowls with clipboards in hand.

But do not call them that. They are "certified eco assessors", and their job is to see, among other things, whether the toilet is clean and dry, and that the taps and hand dryers work.

The Restroom Association of Singapore now has a pool of eight such assessors who do these "audits" with the permission of the toilet owners, who pay an audit fee.

These assessors are paid at least \$30 per audit, and will certify toilets that make the cut as "Happy Toilets".

Announcing this on World Toilet Day yesterday, the association said it wants seven in 10 of the 35,000 public toilets here certified by the end of 2010. It also aims to have 60 certified eco assessors by next year.

Certification lasts a year, and only 170 toilets here are now "certified".

The association began its Happy

Toilet programme in 2003, when it charged a flat audit fee of \$100 per toilet, or \$80 for operators with more than 10 toilets within a building or within 1km of one another.

Yesterday, a more flexible audit fee structure was unveiled, with the fee pegged to the number of cubicles or urinals, so smaller operators disadvantaged by the flat fee structure will be encouraged to get certified.

But the going will not be easy, and the association will have to do a lot of persuading, said its president Tan Puay Hoon.

Two associations representing more than 600 coffee shops said their members were unlikely to get on board if certification is not a must.

Mr Hong Poh Hin, who chairs the Fochow Coffee Restaurant & Bar Mer-

chants Association, said coffee shops want to keep costs low and do not see the benefits in having certified toilets.

Among owners of smaller businesses for the idea was Mr Jason Lee, 42, of restaurant Seven on Club at Club Street. He said the audit fee was not too much to pay to reassure customers of a "basic standard of hygiene".

But Ms Lydia Loke, 24, who owns Sunset Tavern restaurant and bar in

Clementi, said she would not pay for it because while toilets should be clean, they are not her customers' main focus. When asked if the 2010 target could be met, she said: "If toilet owners, the cleaning industry and the users do their part, it is possible."

The Loo - or Let's Observe Ourselves - campaign was launched yesterday. For more information, visit www.toilet.org.sg



Among the eight certified eco assessors here are Ms Priscilla Chai (left) and Ms Pinky Ramgir. Their job is to ensure toilets are in good condition before "certifying" them as "Happy Toilets". ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN