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A brave man

A BUSINESSMAN who cannot get over the unspeakable state of public toilets has shown zeal in forming a trade association to improve matters. The mission, says Mr Jack Sim, is to have a grassroots crusade develop to make public conveniences less of an embarrassment. Good luck to the man, as this is no easy undertaking. First, there was the threat of fines for improper use of toilets. That brought Singapore much notice but not much else. Now, a trade group that will bring together companies which supply and maintain washrooms. It aims to link up with restroom associations overseas to compare notes and share ideas. This amuses, but is not funny. Toilets in food and recreational centres, even well-kept commercial complexes, are among the few blights that stain the national reputation for cleanliness. Mr Sim's initiative is a reminder of how bad the situation continues to be, and how little public imagination has gone into ways of breaking a bad habit.

Singapore aims for world class in a good many ventures, so why be bashful about world-class toilet design? It is not theory that bad layout and plumbing, poor fittings and dim lighting encourage crude habits. Mr Sim's association will have done plenty if it could set the trend in updating toilet design and fittings, and introduce state-of-the-art plumbing and cleansing technologies for odour-free discharge. Maintenance procedures are urgent, as witness the old attendants who are all that loo upkeep should not be. People who use five-star hotel restrooms do not leave a stain, do they? Yet, they could be the same people who add to the filth in public ones. But, ultimately, toilet charity begins at home. Teach the young to respect public property as they would the household toilet. The rest is second nature.