

It makes sense to have clean toilets

By GWENDOLYN NG

SINGAPORE is known for its clean and green image but its public toilets often end up in a bad light.

The dilemma is blamed on the lack of civic consciousness and sense of ownership of public facilities on the part of a minority, said a sociologist.

Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser from the National University of Singapore's department of sociology said: "I think most Singaporeans are civic conscious, but it takes only a small minority to mess things up. I bet this minority are quite capable of keeping their private toilets clean."

She called public toilets "critical" facilities which people cannot avoid using. Females, in particular, cannot avoid having close contact with toilet seats, she said.

Prof Tan added: "Public toilets are very much 'in your face'

kind of facilities, unlike dirty streets and parks, which one can avoid."

To spruce up the state of public toilets here, a slew of toilet cleanliness campaigns and competitions have been organised for a number of years.

Recently, the Restroom Association of Singapore (RAS) gave out tissue packets emblazoned with catchy slogans to encourage members of the public to mind their toilet manners.

Earlier this week, the South West District crowned the cleanest toilets in its neighbourhoods.

Some detractors say the crux of the issue lies with the standard of cleaners who help to maintain the toilets.

The founder of the World Toilet Organisation, Mr Jack Sim, said: "Focus should be placed on the need for professional cleaners and enforcement by the authorities."

Mr Sim is for improving the

welfare of cleaners by raising their wages and providing them with proper training.

But why so much fuss over toilet cleanliness? Experts say the importance of toilet hygiene was highlighted in the wake of the Sars outbreak in 2003.

Mr Sanjay Balan, RAS' outreach and education manager, said: "People are more aware of the importance of restroom hygiene as (the lack of) it could lead to diseases."

Getting people to take toilets seriously can be a challenge, but the state of the loos is serious business.

Clean toilets have been proven to increase human traffic at shopping malls and food centres and this in turn rakes in profits for stakeholders there.

Mr Balan said: "Business owners want to make money. They have told us that clean toilets keep customers happy and boost sales."

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