

# Handing out Happy Toilet award

Singapore and the UK are both amidst a public campaign to search out the best public restroom facilities in their respective countries. The former is a fledgling initiative by the Restroom Association of Singapore (RAS) while the other is an established campaign headlined by the British Toilet Association (BTA).

The RAS aims to flush away badly maintained, ill-equipped and non-functioning public toilets with the launch of its "Happy Toilet" programme.

Targeting public establishments, the RAS believes that clean public toilets are critical for business success. Aiming to separate the good toilets from the bad, the Happy Toilet programme is a branding exercise, to give recognition to good toilets with awards of three, four and five-stars covering individual categories such as hotels, coffeeshops, community centres, parks and shopping centres.

The campaign, which is supported by Singapore's National Environment Agency (NEA), was officially launched in July with the unveiling of Singapore's very first, five-star "Happy Toilet" at Tampines Mall.

According to Jack Sim, president of RAS, the programme will focus on three main areas, architecture and design, behaviour and cleanliness. He opined that the architectural design of toilets rarely takes into account the specific needs of the public who will use that toilet.

For example, factory toilets require a different layout and facilities to a shopping centre toilet. Toilets catering to young people or the handicapped also have special requirements, just as the amount of traffic will impact on toilet design and the construction techniques.

The Happy Toilets programme complements the NEA's "Singapore's OK" cam-



Singapore's Minister for the Environment Lim Swee Say 'christianing' Singapore's first five-star toilet

paign, which labels public toilets "OK" when they satisfy four criteria, i.e. ensure all fittings are in good working order, provide soap and toilet paper, working hand-dryer or paper towels, and a cleaner during peak hours.

According to a press statement by the NEA, about 75 percent of the 29,000 public toilets in Singapore are now 'OK'. The NEA is also extending a grant of S\$4 million (US\$2.9 million) to help building owners co-fund the upgrading of their public toilets.

Across to the North Atlantic, the Loo of the Year awards by the BTA is being co-sponsored by Unger Enterprises. The 17<sup>th</sup> instalment of the annual award for the best restrooms in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland will go to the establishment with the most points in 18 different categories including restroom décor, cleanliness, fixtures and fittings and overall management and air quality.

In a press statement by Unger Enterprises, it was stated that the award is designed to promote cleanliness, convenience, and an overall positive experience when using a public restroom.

"More and more facilities are recognising the marketing power of their loos," said Richard Chisel, director of the

BTA. "It proves that well-managed loos are not just welcomed by customers - they are also good for business."

## Campaigning for British loos

The British Toilet Association (BTA) is carrying out a major survey of public toilet provision to establish current numbers provided by each local authority throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

"Since the Audit Commission stopped collecting national data two years ago, we know large numbers of public toilets have been closed permanently and many others now operate with reduced opening hours," said BTA director Richard Chisel.

"This UK wide survey will enable us to paint a detailed picture of current levels of provision, particularly in respect of facilities for special needs users, such as babies and young children as well as the elderly and infirm."

Chisel was also quoted as

saying that there is no current obligation by the local authorities to provide any public toilets. This, coupled with the requirements to comply with the UK's anti-disability discrimination laws, makes it easier for the authorities to close these public loos down then to bring them up to standard.

"They are simply finding it easier to close them down and leave the issue of toilet provision to other providers such as pubs and cafes," he said.

The BTA is a campaigning body, trying to improve the standards of all 'away from home' toilets and persuade local authority providers to invest in new, inclusive toilet facilities for both residents and visitors.

- The Cleanzine