



The Office Building Link

The Long View of Restroom Design **By Klaus Reichardt, Waterless Co. LLC**

A recent study reported in USAToday found that after years of free spending and charging just about anything in sight, American consumers have put on the brakes. They are cutting back on all fronts, from travel and dining out at restaurants to holiday gifts, and even canceling cable services such as HBO and Showtime.

The reason, of course, is the faltering economy. And one of the interesting points presented in the study is that this spending reduction is impacting all income groups. Even those making more than \$100,000 per year are reportedly cutting back on eating out at restaurants, ordering takeout, buying home furnishings, and drinking specialty coffee.

Although most facility managers are not spendthrifts, for the past few years some indulgence in building luxuries, such as more marble, high-end restroom fixtures and counters, and other treats was not uncommon. However, just like everyone else, these managers are now watching their dollars and trying to make wise, cost-effective buying decisions, selecting products that will last over time as they help minimize cleaning needs.

Fortunately, when it comes to restrooms, facility managers, developers and building owners can take a number of steps that help lower costs and, what may be more important in the long run, keep cleaning and maintenance costs down for years to come.

For instance, a very simple example is the color of countertops, partitions, and other large surface areas found in restrooms. A black or dark countertop may add drama and highlight to a restroom, but dark countertops require more cleaning throughout the day. A light-colored countertop will not show as many spills, water spots, smudges, and other stains that typically develop during the course of the day, therefore requiring less cleaning.

Similarly, light-colored partitions are more forgiving and will not show as much soiling as a dark-colored partition, reducing cleaning needs and making it more cost effective over time. It is also recommended to avoid the use of stainless steel as much as possible. Although stainless steel is still popular for kitchen

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appliances, and many facilities selected stainless steel for the bathroom thinking it would deter graffiti and vandalism, most cleaning professionals find keeping stainless steel clean and smudge-free to be a difficult, ongoing undertaking.

Overall, the fewer high-polish surfaces a restroom has, the easier and more cost effective it is to maintain. Less glossy, neutral-colored items not only are easier to keep clean, but also stay in style longer and do not need to be replaced as often.

Fixture Selection

Here again, managers, builders and developers have a wide variety of product choices to select from. However, a key issue that must be addressed when selecting toilets, urinals, and faucets is how much water they use. Many experts believe we are diminishing our supply of fresh water. As a result, water and sewer costs are expected to rise and, in some areas of the country, rise significantly.

Although toilets are required to use 1.6 gallons of water per flush (gwf) nationwide, in California they will soon be limited to just 1.3 gwf. Manufacturers have introduced toilets that already meet the California requirement and even surpass it. In addition, totally new systems that use compressed air and a limited amount of water per flush are available and becoming increasingly cost effective. Many visitors to Las Vegas will notice these in some of the major hotels there as well.

Similarly, no-water urinals appear to have finally taken hold and are now found in a number of facilities. Introduced in the United States more than 15 years ago, these systems look very much like traditional urinals but without the flush handle. Urine passes through an ecotrap filled with a sealant, preventing odors from being released into the air. As the trap fills, the urine flows into a conventional drainpipe – much the same way a traditional urinal works.

As much as 40,000 gallons of water can be saved each year per urinal with a waterless system. Moreover, most cleaning professionals find they are relatively easy to clean and maintain because the dryness of the urinal prevents bacteria buildup.

Installation Issues

Interestingly, cleaning professional report that where items such as soap and paper towel dispensers or hand dryers are located in a restroom can impact the restroom's cleaning needs. If soap drips on countertops and floors, it requires more maintenance and can become a safety hazard. Similarly, when restroom users wash their hands and then must walk a short distance to reach paper towels or hand dryers, water drips onto the floor, requiring more cleaning.

In fact, placement of all restroom fixtures can impact overall cleaning and maintenance. The entire path from fixture to fixture should be efficient and easy to follow. It is also best to make sure toilet stall doors swing outward. If they swing inward, it is too difficult to enter and exit the area, and the door surfaces tend to get soiled more quickly.

Most likely, when the economy picks up steam, a touch of opulence will return.

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However, we may learn some lessons from this downturn: a restroom does not have to be expensive and opulent to be stylish and attractive. Cost savings are “in” no matter what the economy.

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