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Survey Reveals Interesting Trends About Bathrooms



Story by Mike Flenniken

Sally has been reading an engrossing book at her local coffeehouse for more than two hours, and has downed three cups of coffee while doing so. Nature has finally called, but the private women's restroom is occupied. Sally notices, however, that the door to the men's restroom is cracked open and the light is off. Is she more likely to sneak in the empty men's room than, say, Bill would in a similar situation?

According to a recent online survey, the answer to that question is yes.

Commissioned by Waterless Co., a manufacturer of waterless urinals, the survey of 125 people mostly connected to the professional building and cleaning industries found that 54 percent of women reported a willingness to use a private men's restroom if the women's restroom were occupied. This was opposed to 41 percent of men who said they would use a women's restroom if the situation were reversed.

These were two of seven questions asked on the survey that was conducted earlier this year for Waterless Co. by AlturaSolutions Communications, a Chicago-based marketing and communications firm.

Klaus Reichardt, founder and CEO of Vista, Calif.-based Waterless Co., said the company is beginning a back-to-basics program to see how its products fit in the ever-evolving restroom arena. This includes investigating users' attitudes toward public restrooms, their comfort levels, changes they are accepting, and changes with which they are not comfortable.

Another question the survey asked sought to gauge willingness to use a unisex restroom if it had partitioned toilets. Sixty-four percent of respondents said they would be willing to do so, as opposed to 28 percent who would not. Eight percent said it would depend.

Reichardt said that while the high acceptance of unisex restrooms is similar to what other surveys have found, surveys also find that

women want separate restrooms for privacy reasons and men strongly prefer using urinals when in a public restroom.

“For instance, unisex restrooms were virtually unheard of in the United States a decade or more ago,” he said. “Today, we find that younger people have few problems with them, but older folks are very uncomfortable with one restroom for both sexes. That is an example of changing times and changing attitudes.”

The survey also found that:

- The type of restroom respondents would try to avoid the most would be a gas station restroom (34 percent), followed by bus stations (18 percent), stadiums or sports centers, (11 percent) and fast-food locations (9 percent).
- In general, 42 percent of people said they did not avoid busy restrooms, as opposed to 31 percent who said they did. About 27 percent of respondents said it depends.
- When shopping, 27 percent of people would be more likely to select a store or shopping area if they knew where the restrooms were located, while 50 percent said they would not be more likely to do so. Twenty-three percent said it depends.
- Twenty percent of respondents said the permanent closing of a public restroom in a store, shopping area, restaurant or any other type of facility would keep them from going back there again. Twenty-eight percent said they would go back anyway, and 52 percent said it all depends.

Because Waterless Co. works closely with the professional cleaning industry, Reichardt said company officials know that many products that make restroom cleaning more effective are now available. However, they tend to be used more frequently in such places as Western Europe than the United States.

“The problem is that many facility managers, especially in the United States, continue to use cleaning products and technologies that have been in place for more than a century,” he said. “A way to get more people less reluctant to use gas station, train station

and other public restrooms is to transfer to these more effective cleaning methods and technologies.”

As for unisex restrooms, Reichardt said the decision on whether to take steps to increase acceptance of them was not Waterless’ call.

“Of course, as urinal manufacturers, we support men having their own restrooms and women their own as well,” he said. “We acknowledge that more facilities may adopt the unisex model. However, we do not believe this will be a significant long-term trend. Restrooms are very private places, and even many younger people who accept unisex restrooms today may have less enthusiasm for them as they get older.” 📷

