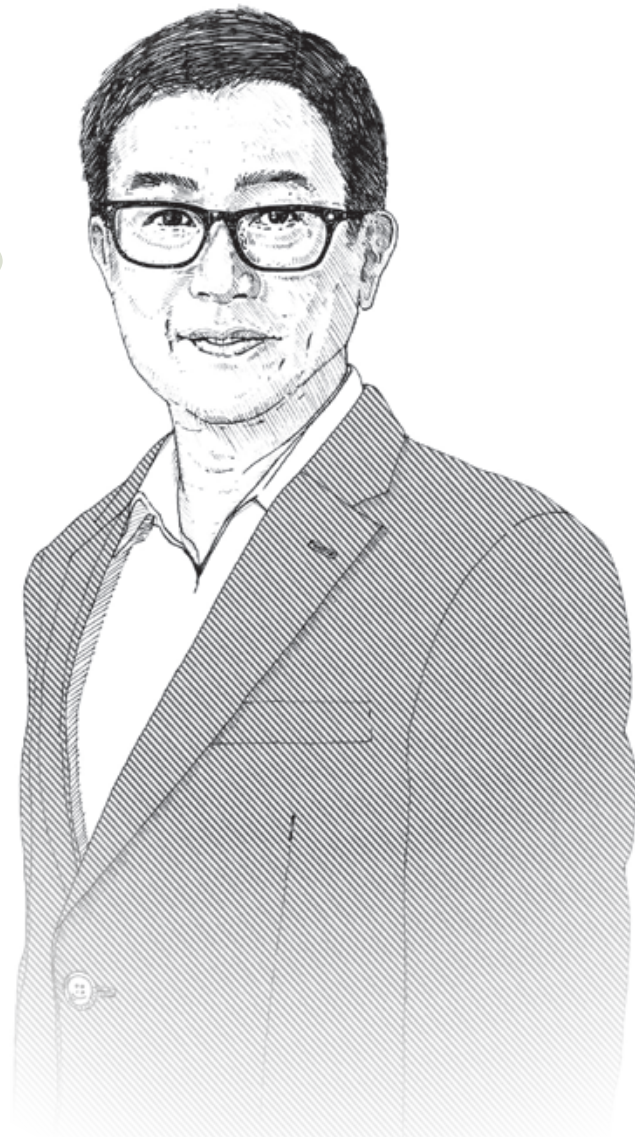




Jack Sim

The ABCs of Public Sanitation

“Cities and buildings become dysfunctional when good, clean toilets are absent.”



Jack Sim, founder of the Restroom Association (Singapore) and the World Toilet Organization, explains why public sanitation is critical for protecting the health and well-being of residents in cities.

Toilets. Pee. Poo. Sanitation. These are not sexy subjects to talk about, but how they are managed is essential to our quality of life. This is especially important in cities, where many people live in crowded, polluted and—worse—unsanitary conditions.

This article will address the importance of public sanitation in cities and give suggestions on areas for improvement—in alphabetical order for easy recall.

Proximity to proper functioning toilets, as well as a good waste management system, is necessary to maintain good sanitary conditions in cities. Without these, the health of citizens would be at risk.

Architecture of Cities

Cities are designed for people and people need to use the toilet every two to three hours. Cities and buildings become dysfunctional when good, clean toilets are absent. Yet most architects are not “toilet-trained”.

We need human-centred design for public toilets in buildings, transport, parks, shops, places of worship, schools, highways, tourist attractions and all locations away from home.

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Behaviour of People

The relationship between people and toilets, or the managers of such facilities, is similar to any other relationship. If the facility serves users well, users will treat the facility with respect. Toilet users are like customers—always hold them in esteem and do everything to serve them by ensuring that toilet facilities are clean and work well.

Cleaning Training

The function of a toilet is to receive human waste but it cannot self-clean. A dirty toilet requires human intervention to bring it back to a state of cleanliness. The toilet cleaner is a technician who needs to be professionally trained and remunerated to produce dry and hygienic conditions. If training is neglected, toilets will be dirty, wet, smelly and unappealing to users.

Design

To achieve good toilet design, ergonomics and a good understanding of user behaviour is critical for selecting the right material, sanitary ware, equipment and supplies. Ventilation, natural lighting and creating an inviting environment are also important to lift spirits and inspire joy in the place. All these matter in ensuring the well-being of the user. Design for happiness and relief and you will get it right.

Environmental Pollution of Waterways

4.5 billion people’s excreta is not treated before discharge. This includes the nearly one billion who defecate in the open and those with toilets that discharge directly into rivers, seas, lakes and open spaces.

Such environmental pollution contaminates good drinking water and spreads diseases. Half of all hospital beds in developing countries are occupied by patients suffering from waterborne diseases. Diarrhoea kills more children every year than HIV-AIDS, measles and malaria combined.

Funding, Government Policy and Health

Prevention is cheaper than cure. Sanitation was voted by the British Medical Journal as the most important medical advancement in the last two centuries. The invention of the flush toilet has extended life expectancy by 20 years.

Investment Return

Healthy nations are productive nations. Analysis by World Bank economist Guy Hutton reveals that every dollar invested in sanitation has a fivefold return on investment by reducing non-working days, medical expenses and productivity losses.

I created 19 November as World Toilet Day, which was unanimously adopted by all 193 countries of the UN General Assembly. This day was established to draw attention and inspire action to address the global sanitation crisis. It is important for us to generate greater awareness of this issue, in order to protect the health and well-being of residents in the cities by promoting and driving demand for a higher quality of life.

The toilet is the happiest room in the world. You go in unhappy and come out happy and relieved. My wish is for all readers to have a happy, healthy and dignified relationship with your life partner, the toilet. 