

Restroom maintenance beyond cleaning

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Maintenance Matters

Dealing with outmoded equipment.

by: Robert Kravitz

A young man decided to move his gym membership from a relatively inexpensive gym to a considerably more expensive, upscale facility.

Everything about the new gym was top notch, including the toiletries provided in the locker room.

Quality soap, shampoo, and conditioner were found in the showers; shaving cream, colognes, body creams, and antiperspirants were available at the mirrored vanity counters, all enclosed in handsome containers.

However, it was the containers — as attractive as they were — that became a source of annoyance.

The young man liked the spray antiperspirant, but, invariably the dispensers did not work.

The shaving gel was great, but, here too, it was regularly either clogged up or again did not work.

However, the worst offense in this high-end gym was the fact that twice in three months the same auto-flushing urinal was not working, causing malodors in the restroom.

Although the young man was satisfied overall with his decision to join the more expensive gym, these little annoyances in such a nice and expensive facility definitely tempered his excitement.

And, when he visited the gym the next day and found that the same problem still existed, his annoyance turned to complaints.

In his mind, these problems should not exist at all, but if they do, dispenser problems, non-flushing urinals, and just about any other restroom inconvenience should be corrected promptly — certainly within 24 hours.

Beyond cleaning

Building service contractors (BSCs) read trade magazines that offer a variety of helpful ideas and suggestions to help streamline restroom cleaning, while also making restrooms more sanitary and hygienic.

However, restroom maintenance beyond cleaning — such as stocking paper products, ensuring auto-dispensing systems work properly, and keeping paper towel, soap, and other dispensers in proper working order — is sometimes overlooked.

Cleaning professionals typically focus on replenishing dispensers, but sometimes overlook or do

not take the time to check if the dispensers are working properly.

And, if the units do not need a refill, seeing if they are operating properly can be delayed even longer.

According to Klaus Reichardt, founder and managing partner of Waterless Co. LLC, it's common for restroom fixtures to clog, jam, and malfunction, especially with long-term and/or heavy use, or if relatively inexpensive equipment has been installed.

As a result, these systems should be checked regularly.

And, as we saw with the gym member discussed earlier, because malfunctioning dispensers can be so annoying to end users, Reichardt suggests BSCs add to their cleaning contracts that dispensers will be not only "refilled as needed each visit," but "checked that they are working properly" as well.

Problem areas

According to Reichardt, some of the more common problems include:

- **Auto-flushing systems.** These systems are very popular because they help improve hygiene and keep restroom facilities clean. Some systems are direct-wired, operating from a facility's electrical supply. However, most use batteries that must be replaced and disposed of properly as they run down.
- **Auto-dispensing systems.** Similar to auto-flushing systems, the batteries on these (soap/water/paper towel dispensing) units must also be checked regularly. Additionally, the sensor or photo-eye on the unit should be wiped clean with an all-purpose, non-corrosive cleaner. Also, ensure that the sensors are aligned properly.
- **Paper towel dispensers.** Paper towel dispensers, manual or automatic, require periodic maintenance and are a frequent source of complaints by restroom users when they malfunction. One way to keep them operating correctly is to wipe clean or vacuum the interior of the unit when changing rolls. Sometimes these dispensers jam because the mounting screws need to be adjusted, which is minor, but often locks and levers are broken. This can be a more involved repair and require removing or even replacing the unit. Many paper towel dispensers are designed with "controlled delivery." Only so much paper is dispensed at one time. However, if too limited, it may annoy users who pull aggressively for more paper to be released. This can cause jams or for the unit to break down. Human error can also be a cause for malfunctioning paper dispensers. Often, the paper is simply not placed in the unit correctly.
- **Soap dispensers.** Most soap dispensers now have cartridge refills. When changing the cartridge, cleaning professionals should also wipe clean the inside of the unit.
- **Specialty dispensers.** As with the gym mentioned earlier, some facilities provide attractive "specialty" dispensers for users. It is crucial that the valves be checked to see that they are working properly and that spouts be cleaned regularly. These units often malfunction because the contents dry out and become hard from lack of use or exposure to air.

The fixture problem

"Malfunctioning toilets and urinals are typically not the responsibility of the cleaning professional

to fix,” says Reichardt. “He or she is expected to tell building engineers and managers so they can have them repaired.”

However, Reichardt says the main reason toilets and especially urinals malfunction is not necessarily from use, but often from vandalism.

And, although we see this mostly in schools, the problem is actually widespread, especially in public facilities, such as bars, restaurants, and stores.

“Managers are addressing this problem by selecting more vandal-resistant plumbing fixtures,” he says. “Usually this means flush handles have been replaced by some type of more costly auto-flushing systems.”

However, urinals can still pose a problem even if an auto-flushing system has been installed.

This is one reason why some facilities are turning to no-water or waterless urinal systems, which completely alleviate mechanical plumbing problems.

“In fact, for many facilities, the interest in saving water is not the key reason waterless urinal systems are installed,” says Reichardt. “It is because they are looking for ways to end vandalism and the expensive plumbing bills that result.”

When people visit a restroom, they not only want it to be clean, healthy and sanitary, but they expect all of the dispensing systems to be filled and functioning properly.

This is the job of the BSC.

Fortunately, most dispensing systems are made for years of reliable performance; however, how long they last and how well they perform depends on how well they are maintained.

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