

TOP 10 TRENDS



IN RECREATION RESTROOMS

New amenities
demand new thinking

BY DAVE LARSON

While beautiful, updated fitness equipment, a newly finished gym floor, a bright welcome desk, or a spacious running track are certainly exciting changes for a new or renovated recreation center, what consideration has been given to the less-glamorous amenities of restrooms and changing stations? These spaces see the most traffic in the facility, and their condition can leave a lasting impression with guests. The following list outlines ideas for when your facility's restrooms are in need of some TLC or even a complete overhaul:

1 Location, Location, Location

The restrooms' locations should be intuitive, and placed where guests might expect them. Signage should be obvious and visible from the open spaces of the fitness areas, for example. Placing restrooms well within the code-mandated distance of 400 feet of an activity area will provide a shorter path for all, particularly helpful for senior users and those with wheelchairs. Because restrooms' loud flushes and hand-dryers can be disruptive to visitors and staff, an acoustic separation should be considered to minimize noise pollution.

2 Materials: Rough And Tough

Because restroom stalls and other nooks are often hidden from view, they can, unfortunately, be the



target of mischief. Ceramic tiles with special epoxies are a solid choice, as they can withstand markers and other graffiti, as well as a facility's daily cleaning regimen. In general, designers should specify durable materials that can be easily wiped clean. Graffiti-resistant walls and fixtures can still be aesthetically pleasing, though, with the use of non-traditional color and pattern choices. Since a restroom is separated from the center's main areas, it doesn't need to blend in a strict design sense. Here, there is more freedom for designers to present a cheerful atmosphere with unique finishes and bright colors, where the rest of the center may be presented in more subdued hues.

3 Look! Don't Touch!

With a growing concern about hygiene, new concepts in restroom design are emerging.

Doors that can be pushed out from the inside with a hip or arm prevent the user from touching a

door's surface or grasping a handle. For those who wish to use a hand towel to grasp the door on exiting the restroom, a receptacle for disposal can be conveniently placed. If a



Figure 2

door needs to be installed so that it swings into the restroom, hands-free attachments can be installed at the base of the door, allowing users to simply open it with their foot instead (see figure 1). Special hygienic door handles exist that allow users to open the

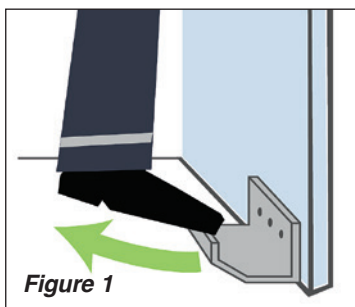


Figure 1

door with a forearm, avoiding the use of hands, which tend to spread germs easily (see figure 2). Even in-stall feminine-product receptacles and trash receptacles are available with hands-free options as well.

4 Countertops And Sinks And Soap, Oh My!

Plastic laminate countertops—once popular in recreation-center restrooms—are now considered outdated for a few reasons: These surfaces tend to de-laminate over time, daily cleaning can distort the color, and they are susceptible to chips and scrapes. A busy restroom needs a solid-surface countertop with clean edges and few or no ridges, which tend to accumulate dirt, mold, and mildew. Caulked areas, too, are magnets for mold and mildew, and should be minimized. Choose integrated sink/counters that make for an easier, more effective cleaning program. Sensor-activated plumbing and soap dispensers not only minimize the spread of germs, but also require fewer moving parts, which translates into ease of maintenance.



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5 Hand Dryers: A Lot Of Hot Air

The location of hand-dryers or towel-dispensers within a restroom is sometimes overlooked or discounted. Dryers and towels should be located as close to sinks as possible to avoid drips on the floor, which may result in falls or other accidents. Going the paperless route with hand-dryers is a popular option, but it isn't for everyone. Although the environmental impact can't be argued, studies have shown that people prefer hand-towels to hand-dryers¹. Other considerations involve noise, cost, and drying efficiency.

6 Mirror, Mirror On The Wall

The generous use of mirrors in a restroom can make the area feel more open and less institutional. Their placement is also important. People walking by outside a restroom should not find mirrors visible when people are entering and exiting, or when restroom doors are open. Privacy is paramount.

7 Lighting And Ventilating No-No's

Although a restroom should be well-lit, the use of cold, blue-tinted lights should be avoided, as should an overly bright, fluorescent atmosphere. Regarding ventilation, designers recommend "over-ventilating"



restrooms—above code mandates—in order to provide a comfortable, odor-free environment. Ceiling heights can contribute to this effort (10-foot ceilings present a better "feel" than 8-foot ceilings), but the associated costs with a ceiling renovation can sometimes be prohibitive.

8 Green Latrine

As noted above, the use of hand-dryers versus towels is an ongoing debate. Waterless urinals, too,

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are not the universally accepted green solution for men's rooms. Although they represent a sustainable option that protects natural resources, these urinals can require additional maintenance related to drain cartridges. Also, items dropped into urinals need to be retrieved by hand. Newer toilet valves offer two-stage flush options dependent on how aggressive the flush needs to be. Green, sustainable, energy-efficient solutions are constantly improving, offering exciting new options for recreation restrooms.



Keep It Clean!

The location of the janitor's storage area should be either adjacent to or within a recreation restroom for the convenience of daily cleaning or quick clean-ups. If the budget allows, wall-mounted toilets versus floor-mounted ones make for simpler cleaning and maintenance. Wall-mounted toilets provide for less dust and dirt accumulation. Barrier-free and ADA code requires that plumbing pipes be covered. Instead of using a sleeve over under-sink piping, consider using a screen that conceals piping in a more aesthetic, easily maintainable way. Diaper-changing stations should be located in both men's and women's restrooms, and located in a dedicated alcove outside of the main circulation area, and with a separate, covered trash receptacle.



All In The Family

Family restrooms have quickly become requirements in newly constructed buildings. Beyond their intended use for guests with young children—including for providing a location for those with unique cultural/religious beliefs, or for transgender guests—these spaces are often a busy area within a center. Offering more family restrooms than required per building code is a great idea, and likely will not result in “wasted space.”

Whether your facility is in need of a facelift or you are considering a new building, don't overlook the importance of carefully planning the center's restrooms. With a variety of options and features to choose from, the process can seem overwhelming. Be sure to ask the right questions of your design team so your facility offers the appropriate amenities for your community! **PRB**

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1. Mayo Clinic Proceedings <http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/>; Volume 87, Issue 8, Pages 791–798, August 2012

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