

# Controlling Restroom Abuse in High Traffic Facilities

---

When walking into an office building, it's easy to become wowed by the lobby or a particular office space. But tenants spend a lot more time in the restroom, visiting 3-5 times a day on average - or more than three work days a year.

If this isn't enough to make a case for clean, well stocked and appealing restrooms, consider this fact: problem restrooms can have a lasting impact on perceptions of an establishment as a whole, according to a recent survey undertaken by Opinion Research International for Kimberly-Clark.

More than three-quarters of respondents said that broken or vandalized dispensers in public restrooms would negatively affect their overall opinion of the facility. An even greater number -- 82 percent -- said broken, damaged or vandalized dispensers would lead them to think the restroom was neglected by management, while more than half said these conditions would cause them to view the restroom as unsanitary.

Office buildings and other public restrooms are visited by a large number of people on a daily basis. And massive use can mean abuse from rough treatment of dispensers -- from jammed levers to cigarette burns, to trash on the floor, dripping water or soap, pilferage and even graffiti.

To avoid these problems, evaluate the types of abuses that typically occur in a facility like yours, the users visiting the restroom, their restroom use patterns, your equipment maintenance procedures and the typical lifecycle and replacement needs of washroom products. Then evaluate the design, installation materials and restroom products used to make sure they are more durable and can handle high traffic and abuse situations. This may involve a simple retrofit of the restroom or a total rehabilitation.

Research each product area you require in your office building. Some suggestions include the use of:

## **The Sink Area**

### **No Touch Soap Systems:**

These units dispense an appropriate amount of soap into a user's hands as they put them under the dispenser. As such, they limit the amount of soap dispensed at one time and take longer to dispense than push systems. Thus they minimize the waste factor. A push system also is less likely to be ripped off the wall.

### **Sensor-Operated Faucets:**

These units have surged in popularity. An automated on-off function on the faucets can limit the use of water, aiding facilities interested in water conservation.

**Paper Towel Dispensers:**

Again, the key is to look for more durable products that can better withstand the rigors of traffic, vandalism and abuse and still work properly. An option here is an ABS plastic, double-thick walled construction dispenser with a contoured design and no hard corners. This type of product withstands greater impact and force if grabbed or hit and because it is rounded, it is less likely to be a resting place for cigarettes. Thus, it will incur fewer burn marks than standard dispensers. Also locking mechanisms, which come on this type of dispenser, deter theft and vandalism.

**Mirrors:**

As they are traditionally glass, in high traffic or vandal-prone school restrooms they can shatter and break. An option to consider here is polished stainless steel. These come with or without frames. Shatter-resistant or laminated glass are other options. Or, if you already have glass mirrors, you can protect the glass with a plastic shield.

**Personal Care Dispensers:**

Recessed solid phenolic-faced or curved stainless steel is the best options for dispensing sanitary napkins, tampons, and condoms. As with bathroom and towel dispensers, choose units with locking mechanisms to protect not only the products, but the money inserted to pay for them.

**The Restroom Stalls**

Partitions: Many times restrooms are designed and built using inexpensive materials. Partitions which can be banged, beaten, written or painted on are bound to cause problems. Finished stainless steel panels and man-made "stone look-a-likes" are strong and offer effective surfaces for deterring graffiti.

Dark, solid phenolic partitions are less apt to be defaced by graffiti and it is less likely to be visible if written on. Chemical protectants can be helpful, too, to keep paint or markers from sinking in to surfaces. They facilitate easier removal. Sacrificial plastic film can also protect partitions from being permanently damaged.

**Bathroom Tissue Dispensers with Rounded or Contoured Design:**

Again, look for dispensers made of durable plastic with extra thick wall construction and reinforcement. They won't dent like stainless steel. And with a contoured design, patrons can't rest cigarettes on the dispenser, minimizing burn marks.

**Protective Seat Cover Dispensers:**

Consider solid phenolic or curved stainless steel as they are strong materials which resist abuse. Also look for one at a time dispensing of seat covers so individuals only touch the product they will use. In addition, one-at-a-time dispensing helps minimize waste from people pulling out too many towels at once.

Trash Receptacles: Receptacles should be solid phenolic faced and recessed because they are less prone to impact. They should also be placed right below the towel dispensers if possible. By doing so, less trash is likely to end up on the floor.

## **General Areas**

### **Entry Doors:**

Fiber glass reinforced plastic doors are a good choice as they are lightweight, strong and carry fire ratings up to one-and-a-half hours. They work well in high abuse areas as they are durable and resistant to scuff marks and graffiti, which usually wash right off. In addition, they resist bacteria, mildew and rust.

Gauge is also important as far as doors are concerned. High-abuse situations warrant heavier gauge doors. Doors that are 18-20 gauges are suggested.

### **Caulking:**

Caulk or grout that is waterproof and offers a glass-like finish should be considered. This material is difficult to write on and doesn't allow absorption or bleeding into crevices.

### **Flooring:**

A good product choice here is vinyl floors with nylon facing. This type of flooring is durable, resists staining, and is easy to clean.

## **It's All for the Best**

By taking into account the restroom products and systems installed as well as adopting a common sense approach to implementing policies for maintaining them, both users and building services personnel overseeing high traffic restrooms will feel good about having better looking, well-equipped and well-functioning surroundings.

Remember, spending more dollars up front on restroom equipment that can withstand abuse can help prevent costly maintenance, repair or replacement later on.

## **Sidebar**

Key Considerations for the Heavy Use and Abuse Restroom

- Fiber glass reinforced plastic entry doors
- Heavy duty stall-partition materials
- Restroom product dispensers made of durable materials, such as double reinforced ABS plastic
- Locks and theft-resistant features on dispensers
- Stainless steel as a mirror replacement
- Sensor-activated soap dispensing and water systems