

Paper machines get mixed reviews

“Let me try,” a short, middle-aged woman said as she moved in front of one of the face-recognition toilet paper dispensers that have been installed in restrooms at Beijing’s Temple of Heaven Park. She removed her hat and glasses, and stared straight into the camera. A group of amused fellow tourists looked on, keen to see the new high-tech machines in action.

However, nothing happened.

“Try standing further back,” came a voice from in the crowd. “Make sure you’re standing in the yellow area marked on the floor.”

The 62-year-old woman, surnamed Wang, readjusted her position and, after several seconds, was rewarded with a 60-centimeter strip of crisp, white toilet paper. If she wanted more, she was going to have to wait nine minutes to start the process all over again.

“If I were in a rush, it would be inconvenient,” Wang said.

The Temple of Heaven Park, one of the capital’s major tourist attractions, was not swarmed with visitors on Tuesday afternoon, but many of those who were there made a beeline for the bathrooms.

Managers of the venue have said the dispensers, which have so far been installed in three restrooms on a trial basis, are designed to prevent an age-old issue of people stealing or wasting toilet paper.

However, some people have questioned whether such a high-tech solution sacrifices convenience, as patrons now need to wait for paper before they can relieve themselves.

Shortly after Wang had finished, a mother visited the same restroom with her young daughter. She walked straight past the machine and into a cubicle.

“I have everything I need in my bag, so I don’t need to bother with the dispenser,” she said after re-emerging, adding that the machines are not convenient for parents, particularly those with small children.

Given that the screen is placed at about average height for an adult, it is also unlikely to be of use for wheelchair users. Meanwhile, twins could have a problem, too, if they both need to use the restroom at the same time.

A worker who helped install the dispensers said the management plans to adjust their locations because the long lines of people waiting for toilet paper have been blocking entrances to the venue.

However, some people are happy to put up with a little inconvenience if it puts a stop to thieves.

“Since the new machines have been installed, many of the thieves have

disappeared," said a middle-aged man waiting outside a restroom. "I think it's good to teach them a lesson."