

Unisex restroom slow to gain popularity



The first unisex public restroom in Shanghai [Photo/ThePaper.cn]

Shanghai's first unisex public restroom, designed to help reduce waiting times for women, is failing to woo users, especially females.

The restroom's automatic tally device showed that only about 100 people a day have used it since it opened in November, a rate far lower than other public restrooms in the city.

That could partly be a result of its secluded location – a green space in the city's Pudong New Area that is far from bustling streets or residential areas. Most users are migrant laborers working nearby, with only about 10 percent of its users female.

There have also been complaints that some male users smoke in the restroom, which is forbidden.

"Most of the users are male workers at nearby construction sites, and I have totally different hygienic habits from them," said Zhang Xia, a female who regularly uses the toilet. "Sometimes it's really uncomfortable to use the toilet."

Another user, who only agreed to disclose her surname Jiang, said, "It's really embarrassing and I would like to use other washrooms, even though it's a 5 to 10 minute walk from work."

She added that people smoking in the facility or failing to flush it sometimes made her feel sick.

With 10 unisex cubicles, the public restroom has a separate men-only area featuring four urinals, and another space allocated for people with disabilities and users with children.

“I think it’s fine,” said Wang Lian, who used the restroom for the first time on Friday. “It can reduce waiting times for females who often take longer to use the toilets, and the LED screen at the top of each cubicle clearly shows whether it is vacant or occupied.”

Zhang Hui, a male working at a nearby construction site, said that the higher and stronger partitions between cubicles ensure a more private space.

“However, there is no clear sign indicating the restroom is a unisex one. I felt really confused when I used it for the first time,” he added.

Gu Chunming, who cleans the restroom, said the environment and facility of the unisex restroom is much better than most of the other public restrooms in Shanghai, despite her annoyance about some users’ bad habits.

“Smoking is the biggest problem,” she said. “Warnings are posted at the entrance, but it still can’t be stopped.”

Authorities have said that they will evaluate the response to the restroom before deciding whether to build more in the city.