



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **STOP! Don't Eat Shit!**

*Campaign calls the public to check on the state of public toilets in hawker centres and coffee shops*

Don't Eat Shit Campaign is a student initiative led by a group of students from Singapore Management University together with World Toilet Organization. The campaigns aim to highlight the conditions of public toilets in local hawker centres and coffee shops. Majority of them do not meet the required standards of public toilets in Singapore. Yet the situation simply continues with no action being taken.

These toilets are usually owned by the centre's owners who are more concerned with the crowd that goes there to eat, then hygiene. However, hawkers and vendors themselves use these toilets. Dirty toilets will result in unhygienic toilet habits and these food handlers may cause bacteria to be brought back to their stalls, passing them down to the food they sell. The victim - customers.

This brings back the unfortunate incident of a lady who died from food poisoning after eating at a rojak stall in Geylang Serai. The chopping board had traces of bacteria that are found in faeces. If toilets at these places continue to be at its current state, it is just a matter of time before another person dies of the same reason.

Don't Eat Shit campaign aims to highlight to everyone that something has to be done to these dirty toilets. And it calls for people to stay away from these places which do not prioritize clean toilets. It has seen support from popular retail chain NewUrbanMale.com who designed the campaign logo and looking to commence sale of the Don't Eat Shit themed T-shirts in the near future.

World Toilet Organization is reaching out to everyone in Singapore to become more aware of the surroundings that they eat in. With the majority outcry, hawker centres will one day have the clean toilet accompanied with good food that Singaporeans enjoy.

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## **Background**

Don't Eat Shit Campaign is basically a movement to persuade hawkers to have that incentive to provide clean toilets for their customers. This campaign is championed by a group of SMU students and supported by NewUrbanMale.com and World Toilet Organization.

Most hawker centres and coffee shops toilets do not have soap or toilet paper, and customers are still going there to eat. However, if we think deeper into it, without soap and toilet paper, the main and most frequent users are actually the hawkers themselves. After they have used the toilets, and they do not use soap to clean off all the bacteria and viruses from their hands. And the only way to clean them off is by transferring them to the food that they are preparing. So in reality, we are actually "EATING SHIT" indirectly.

The main cause of all these problems is actually the condition of the toilets. The hawkers have no incentive to provide clean toilets, because it is already a common stereotype that you must have a dirty toilet to be called a hawker centre or coffee shop.

## Interview with Jack Sim, Founder, World Toilet Organization

- **Is the campaign targeted only at hawkers and coffeeshops?**

Our message is for everyone who eat out. But the most significant danger is found at coffeeshops and hawker centers because that's where the toilets situation is most dangerous. This is a proven situation in Geylang Serai Food Center when the Indian Rojak cook inadvertently transferred his faedes onto the chopping board for his clients to eat. This causes 1 death, 1 abortion and more than 100 food poisoning cases. There were also many case of food poisoning in caterers in schools, etc.

We really have 3rd world toilets here.

In the 3rd world, 1.5 million children die of diarrhea every year due to poor hygiene and sanitation. That is a major killer and we must protect ourselves from this risk.

I thought that after that event, toilet hygiene in hawker centers and coffeeshops would improve, but instead it reverted back to scolding the public for poor behavior in toilet. In fact, the blame has been put on the users for the last 30 years without results. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different result.

By blaming the users, attention is diverted from the real things we need to have a clean toilet: Soap, toilet paper, professional cleaner and a good state of repair. So they don't need to do anything new.

That is why we continue to have dirty toilets.

- **What're your views on the state of cleanliness/hygiene in hawkers and coffeeshops in the last say 10 years?**

The state of cleanliness in toilets are shopping centers and other places have improved over the last 10 years, but not much for the coffeeshops and hawker centers. You see, a toilet needs to have an owner to care for it. Shopping centers management knows they lose business if shoppers leave their shops just to go to toilets in hotels next door. So they retain shoppers by

making toilets clean.

Coffeeshops owners feel as toilets is extra cost to them. They say non-customers use their toilets. So they are incentivized to keep it dirty to keep users out.

That's why it continues. By not eating at these dirty places, we are incentivizing them to make toilets attractive, clean and with supply of soap and paper. NEA also need to ensure 100% enforcement.

- **To achieve cleanliness/hygiene, do you think it is also important for members of the public to adopt certain practices or civic mindedness?**

The public has been brainwashed that if people behave themselves, toilets will be clean. That is not a complete story. And it is so unfair and irresponsible on their part.

Unlike littering which is a different behavior, peeing and pooing are essentially about putting our bodily waste into the WC and urinals.

We cannot pee detergent. We can only pee as accurately as possible. Therein lies many problems:

-The trajectory of male urination varies during urination. At the start, it may miss the target if foreskin prevented a smooth urine flow. In mid-stream, it is more controllable. But at the end stream, the fluid pressure drops and the penis begin to move downwards causing drips onto the floor.

-If the selection of urinals is wrong, the urinal model may not have a long spout to collect the dripping drops. This will stain the floor and cause smell. That is where the cleaners have to clean it up everyday.

-If you see a tissue paper in the urinal, it could be caused by someone wiping his penis head after urinating. If you provide a waste paper basket next to the urinal, he'll dispose it there instead of into the urinal. People need to be facilitated for good behavior to happen. No point blaming them, solve it intelligently.

-There are people who can't help themselves:

The Blind, the mentally challenged, the culturally challenged especially now we have so much foreigners in Singapore.

The Squatters from rural China may squat on top of the WC.

We need the cleaners to clean up when such things are structural.

-Also we are using the lowest flush in the world : 3 liters only.

Once you have diarrhea, it dirty the entire bowl. But the 3 liters flush could only clean the bottom part of the bowl. Even if you flush the second time, it is no use. So the cleaner is needed again. Can you blame user for having diarrhea?

There isn't even a toilet brush in most of our toilets because the coffeeshops owners are worried people will steal their toilet brush. That's a ridiculous mentality.

-Toilet paper usage may be heavy when people use it as toilet seat covers. That's normal. No one is stealing toilet paper.

Coffeeshops owners are so happy that the blame is always on the users, so they don't need to pay for toilet paper and soap and brushes.

-When you don't have urinal partition for Male privacy, the shy male will urinate in the WC. This sprinkle back-splash onto the floor due to high velocity from height. Lifting seat cover is also not incentivized when it is already so dirty.

So a clean toilet stays clean longer and a dirty toilet gets dirtier very fast.

You need to design, select products and train cleaners. NEA also need to enforce and close down outlets that don't comply with rules. They have rules but poor enforcements.

- **What are some of the activities you hope to engage in to bring the campaign to the public and hawker centres and coffeeshops owners?**

By getting people to refuse to Eat Shit anymore, they are sending a strong message to the coffeeshops owners: If you don't clean up, you lose customers.

When their tenants start complaining, the owners will clean up.

When NEA enforces, they will clean up too.

Same goes for hawker centers. If NEA can't fine their own colleagues in charge of hawker centers, how can they fine coffeeshops?

If cleaners are not trained professionally, they'll just spray water and wet the floor. They won't know how to. Remove smell from crystallized salt hidden in the bowls and urinals.

- **Jack, what're your views on the state of cleanliness/hygiene in S'pore's public toilets compared to that in other first-world countries?**

Singapore touted itself as Cleanest City in the World. This is true in most areas. Citizens habits are largely good. But our public toilets in coffeeshops and hawker centers are a disgrace to our national branding. If we solve these 2 areas, we can live up to our brand. That is why we must get it right down to its root causes.

Japanese has highest expectation of toilets. If it is dirty, they don't eat at your restaurant. So you need to upkeep your toilet or you'll lose business. We need to do the same here.

- **What do you think the authorities should focus on or introduce as measures to achieve cleaner public toilets?**

Train the cleaners professionally. Pay them a decent wage. 12 years ago, their wages were \$800 a month. Now after 12 years of inflation, it's \$600-700 a month. Some even gets \$450 a month.

How to get pride in these workers?

Why so low? Because the foreign workers are taking their jobs at these low levels, and doing 2 shifts: 16 hours.

When local cleaners compete with foreigners, it is not a level playing field. Foreign workers sleep in dormitories with hundreds of other workers. Our locals return home to a 3 room flat and he has to feed his family here.

That's why when ministers said the locals are so choosy and unwilling to take the cleaners jobs, they don't know what they are talking about.

When I ask unemployed old folks would they clean toilets? They said No. When I ask them would they clean toilets for \$1000 a month salary, all of them say Yes. Give me the job immediately.

So it is the pay and the training we need to change.

Stop blaming the users. Start enforcing. I spoke to coffeeshop association leaders. They told me: Jack, coffeeshop toilets will forever be dirty. There'll be no change possible. Unless I charge double for the cup of coffee, I cannot afford to keep it clean. Especially the non-customers are coming to use my toilets.

I want readers to respond to this type of thinking. Do you think we can convince the coffeeshops owners? Don't Eat Shit.

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