

The Perfect Time for a Refresh

Leverage a Restaurant Revitalization Fund Grant to update your restrooms for life after COVID-19

By Andrew Warnes



A clean and hygiene-friendly restaurant restroom is of the utmost importance—so important that it can mean the difference between a customer coming back for future business or avoiding an establishment altogether.

According to a survey by Zogby International, more than 80% of patrons would avoid a restaurant with a dirty restroom. Concerns around hygiene have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic; today, people are far more conscious about the importance of hand hygiene—especially in restaurants.

In fact, when people were asked where they were most concerned with people not washing their hands, 40% said restaurants—even more than the 35% of consumers who identified hospitals, clinics and doctors offices as the areas of most concern. A whopping 93% said they try to avoid coming into contact with germs in public restrooms in general.

Simply put, it makes for good restaurant business to keep restrooms clean and modern-looking with hands-free products to keep customers coming back.

Federal Support for Maintenance Costs

Restaurants now have an opportunity to upgrade their restrooms after President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act. The law created the Restaurant Revitalization Fund Grant (RRFG) with a designated \$28.6 billion allocated to help eligible restaurants and similar entities with a number of crucial expenses. These costs were defined as everything from payroll and rent payment to supplies and protective equipment. But another outlet listed for potential funding through the RRFG program is the opportunity to address maintenance expenses required to remain open and maintain a safe space for patrons—and this includes the restroom.

So with a clean and well-maintained restroom being so important to customer retention, let's take a look at some effective renovation tactics to upgrade your restroom with the support of the RRFG.

The Benefits of Sensor Operation

As customers begin to return to restaurants and bars of all types, they've come to expect the comfort that comes with automatic fixtures.



This pertains to the entire restroom, with sensor-operated products ranging from toilet and urinal flushometers to faucets, soap dispensers and hand dryers. No one wants to come into contact with the same faucet handle that has been touched by 100 other people or more throughout the day.

While proper handwashing is important, having to touch manual faucet handles that could harbor viruses and bacteria defeats the purpose of washing your hands in the first place. But with sensor-operated products, a trip from the table to the restroom can now be an entirely touch-free experience.

Integrated sink systems—where sensor-activated faucets, soap dispensers and hand dryers all work together in one highly efficient system—are an increasingly popular renovation solution. Not only do these work effectively to provide a consistent on-deck aesthetic for modern design, but they also help guests get in and out of the

restroom quickly without having to walk across the restroom to dry their hands, dripping water on the floor along the way.

Toilet and urinal flushometers are the most economic and easiest to convert, thanks to kits that enable a simple upgrade process for manual flushometers. These create automatic, sensor-operated solutions that can be installed in a matter of minutes in some instances.

But sensor-operated products don't just support proper hygiene; they also help facility managers cut down on operating costs and improve overall sustainability. By now, we're all well acquainted with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended handwashing guidelines—ensuring hand scrubbing for at least 20 seconds, or the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice. With manual faucets, the water would be running for the entire duration of this process, but touch-free faucets cut down on water consumption thanks to automatic timeouts, dispensing water only when hands are in range of the sensor area.

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A Green Light for Restroom Upgrades

With guests increasingly repopulating restaurants as capacity limits continue to expand, the last thing a facility manager wants is a crowded restroom with people taking time to identify what stalls are available. Now, smart restroom traffic management systems are helping to optimize stall usage and intuitively inform guests where to go by placing red and green lights above stalls to indicate availability—as well as blue lights denoting ADA-compliant stalls.

Technology is also benefitting facility maintenance teams as well as restaurant patrons. Many sensor-operated toilets and flushometers are now available to be integrated with wireless Bluetooth connectivity. By programming these products with a smartphone, restaurants are able to flush the plumbing lines on a regular basis to prevent stagnant water—and the odors that come along with it—from building up. This has become a growing trend in a number of restaurants to ensure a well-maintained space. ■

Andrew Warnes is technical training manager for Sloan, which debuted the first hands-free sensor faucet in 1974. Warnes has been at the forefront of water technology standards for nearly 20 years. He has previously lent his expertise to support the World Health Organization while working as part of the negotiations for microbiological treatment standards between the U.S. and the European Union.

