

GREEN SHEET NEED MONEY? Look in the Bowl

Try to keep a straight face because we're going to be discussing a delicate subject – toilets. Toilets use tons of water and as you have learned in previous Green Sheets: water can be very expensive to waste. Yes, this is not a topic typically tossed around on the pages of a food service journal but there's money involved so please bite your lip and tread on...

A BRIEF HISTORY

Indoor plumbing has provided comfort to restaurant patrons for well over a century but the throne itself has changed very little during that time – until recently. A toilet from the early days used about 2 to 3 gallons of water per flush (gpf). Many of those units worked well with little water because the tank, mounted high on the wall, was an effective gravity/pressure-assist flushing system. This was a pretty neat trick until you had to fix one and then you found yourself on a ladder. So, the tanks came off the wall and the gallons per flush started going up. By the 1980's, flush-rates were hitting 5 gallons and up. These were aptly labeled "high-flush" toilets. In 1985, "low-flush" toilets hit the market boasting 3.5 gpf or less and in 1992 "ultra-low-flush" toilets were introduced at a respectable 1.6 gpf. Recently, "high-efficiency" toilets entered the market at flush-rates of 1.28 gpf or less. Interestingly, many of the new high-tech privies are achieving their remarkable water performance by incorporating a dual flush system (less water for one than the other) or by using a pressurized flush tank that is a modern version of those original high-tank toilets.

ALL THE SAME?

Like any new technology, there are differences in the performance of various ultra-lowflow and high-efficiency models. Some porcelain pioneers got burned on toilets that just didn't get the job done. No need for details – we've all been there. These feeble flushers gave ultra-low-flush loos a bad name so the industry got together and developed the Maximum Performance Test (MaP) to separate the workhorses from the weaklings. The results of the MaP tests are regularly updated and posted online by the California Urban Water Conservation Council at www.cuwcc.org/mapesting.lasso. It pays to check the list before you buy. A high MaP score could save you a lot of head-aches!

GET ON WITH IT!

Okay – enough background – lets talk money. If you have a 3.5 gpf toilet that is getting about 100 flushes a day, then you are using 10,500 gallons a month or about 14 "units" of water. Most restaurants pay anywhere from \$5 to \$9 per unit of water, including the sewer charge, so that toilet is costing anywhere from \$70 to \$126 a month. Installing a 1.6 gpf ultra-low-flow would save 5,700 gallons or \$38 to \$68 a month. That's \$450 to \$800 a year in savings. Stepping up to a 1.1 gpf high-efficiency head would save you somewhere from \$660 to \$1000 a year. A quality, commercial-grade, pressure-assist toilet can be found for about \$400 so you're getting a one year payback on your investment. And, there's an added benefit: pressure assist toilets have 20 plus pounds-per-square-inch of available force and when you hit the handle it's like a cannon. These babies get the job done, so you can just throw away your plunger!

Now let's think about what happens if you want to go from a 1.6 gpf ultra-low-flow to a 1.1 gpf high-efficiency model. The savings only range from about \$100 to \$200 a year so you might be tempted to stick with your current commode but consider this; many of the early 1.6 models used an extra gallon or so per flush (yes, that was cheating) and still didn't perform very well. So, if you have one these "faux" low-flows your savings will be in the \$350 to \$650 range and it's worth your while to trade up. Most full service restaurants have at least three thrones so a year later, after you've recouped your investment, you're pocketing four-figure savings and enjoying premium performance potties!

HELP ON THE WAY

If you are thinking that there is no way you can take the time to research toilets or spend the money buying one, then don't fret, just call for help. California's water utilities are searching for water savings and they are happy to talk to you. Most offer generous incentives to help you capitalize your new can! While you're at it, be sure to ask about what else they have to offer. Usually the menu includes other big money makers like aerators, low-flow pre-rinse valves, irrigation controls, and even steamers for your kitchen!

ONE FINAL TIP

Here's something you may not realize - the flappers in toilet tanks are not interchangeable. When the flapper in your tank eventually wears out you will know it because you will hear water running down the drain. That's the sound of wasted money, so hurry up and replace that dead flapper with one that is meant for your specific tank. If you use the wrong one, it could turn your low-flow toilet into a tsunami special, sending your hard earned money straight to the sewage plant! We've reached the end and you can breathe now. Did you ever think you'd be so toiletiterate? All joking aside, water is too scarce to waste and money is too hard to make, so take a serious look at your water closet and see if you can save some of each! These energy and water saving tips are offered by the PG&E Food Service Technology Center (FSTC), an unbiased food service resource center located in San Ramon, CA. The FSTC program is funded by California utility customers and administered by the Pacific Gas and Electric Company under the auspices of the California Public Utilities Commission. For more information on the FSTC and for our schedule of free energy efficiency seminars, please visit our website at www.Fishnick.com. The FSTC is a member of the California Restaurant Association.

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