

Restroom hand dryers are a lot of hot air

By Rick Maier

I don't like electric hand dryers in restrooms and, from what I've observed, I'm not alone.

Hot air may be friendlier to the environment and cost less than paper towels, but those are poor tradeoffs if fewer people wash their hands to avoid the slower blowers.

Sorry if this is an unpleasant subject, but I believe that we should be encouraging, not discouraging, more people to wash their hands these days.

Any establishment that replaces paper towels and trashcans with blowers is more concerned with cost than hygiene.

The manufacturers even stopped putting those little signs on their dryers – the statement about how the establishment had installed the unit to protect us from the dangers of transmitting disease from paper towel litter. Turns out it was a bunch of hot air.

Here's my typical experience at the gas stations and fast-food restaurants that often have blowers: push the restroom door open, enter the closet-size chamber to do whatever I came in for, operate the fixture, manhandle the often-empty soap dispenser, push the hand dryer button, spend 6 seconds slinging water around, wipe my hands on my pants, and pull the door open to exit.

The experience is so bad, and Americans have become so misophobic (afraid of germs), that an article at www.cleanlink.com says, "60 percent of respondents don't touch a thing in a public bathroom."

People hover over the seat, flush with their foot (or don't flush at all). They avoid the sink, and use towels to shield their hands from surfaces. Of course, this includes food preparers as well as customers.

I wanted to do my own survey, but couldn't figure out a good way to avoid being misunderstood as I stood around observing men in the restroom. Plus, I think there would be a wide margin of exaggeration with any exit interview.

Back when germs seemed friendlier, when I was a kid, I cleaned my hands for two reasons: to remove the visible grime and sticky stuff, and because my mother taught me it was my duty to society to wash after touching "down there." Things sure have changed in today's "all about me" society. I know one guy who washes his hands *before* going to the bathroom to protect himself.

I can also remember decades ago when the finer dining establishments posted attendants in the restrooms who, for the hope of a tip, handed you a cloth towel and made sure things stayed tidy and clean.

Over the years, the number of dangerous germs seems to have increased – from catching a cold to flu, skin infections, intestinal illnesses and diseases such as salmonella, E. coli and hepatitis. It turns out that mom was right all along. Your single best defense is washing your hands after you go to the bathroom.

But even the few of us who wash our hands usually don't do an adequate job (the old three second cold water rinse). The proper hand wash is at least thirty seconds of scrubbing all areas of the hands and fingernails with lots of soap, and water as hot as you can stand it.

Restroom operators should take a lesson from the Atlanta airport and Turner Stadium who probably handle more bathroom visits than anyone: there are no doors to touch, the fixtures operate hands-free, the paper towels pull down and the trash is gravity fed. The only thing you touch is the soap dispenser.

Don't blame the blower manufacturers for pushing their products, but, just like talking dashboards, new Coke and digital dress watches, we tried hot air and we like the old way better.

Owners of public restrooms: please bring back the paper towels. Charge us a few more cents for the fill up or kid's meal if you must, but provide us with a healthier, more pleasant place to 'wash up.'

(Picture of blower)