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2007 TRUCK USE
SURVEY ISSUE

Group showers save space, maintenance issues; ensure privacy for applications

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A century ago, the ultimate luxury — in fact, one of the few luxuries — was the Saturday night bath, and in those pre-water heater days that meant using water heated up at the stove. But thanks to advances in plumbing and changing views of personal hygiene, showers have almost replaced bathtubs, and for many North Americans, a shower has become a daily ritual.

For some, a shower starts the day as a bracing wake-up. For others, a show-

ers revolve around privacy, or more precisely, lack of it. That's often the reason some schools and clubs have begun installing more private areas for showers. There's a downside, however, as some teachers and administrators have discovered that private showers can also invite security concerns.

Bathing sites — At beaches or pools, even toddlers and preschool-age children (under the watchful eye of a parent or caregiver, of course) can learn to rinse sand or mud off without assistance before they head into the locker room to change clothes. At water parks with high attendance year-round, group showers are essential to keep traffic volume moving.

Factories and other work sites — At plant sites where the product involves a grimy, sweaty process, it makes sense for employees to have a space where

ers revolve around privacy, or more precisely, lack of it. That's often the reason some schools and clubs have begun installing more private areas for showers. There's a downside, however, as some teachers and administrators have discovered that private showers can also invite security concerns.

A more practical solution can be achieved by specifying column showers or wall showers with partitions that offer users some privacy. Similar to toilet partitions, these “modesty modules” are short stainless steel partitions built around a prefabricated shower fixture. Column showers or wall-hung showers grouped in multiples of two or four have showerheads that are designed to spray into individual shower areas.

These modules typically include a stall for showering and another optional area for dressing, separated by a curtain. Dressing stalls can include a teakwood seat and robe hooks. In addition to offering users some privacy, such stainless steel solutions resist vandalism. Since most modular shower units are shipped complete with all parts and mounting hardware, installation is simple.

Newer showers have a number of options sure to please both users and facility managers.

Column or wall showers best for high-traffic installations

For high-traffic locker rooms, column showers can accommodate two to six simultaneous users. A primary benefit of column showers is that they take up very little space and require fewer plumbing connections. Unlike older models, newer fixtures offer a greater variety of valves, showerheads and options to meet a wide range of uses. Another benefit is that since column showers are placed in the middle of the room, the outside walls remain dry, so less cleanup is required.

Wall showers are an alternative option for larger areas. Wall showers with individual valves control the water flow at each station. Specifying valves with push-button control means showers are only activated when the push button is released, preventing ‘hold open’ activation and ensuring that showers are not left running when not in use. Models with chrome-plated brass showerheads have no necks that could be broken off, and security screws that withstand tampering.

For budget-conscious customers, an alternative to built-in, wall-mounted units or column showers are hinged pivoting wall showers. The

special hinge door on pivoting showers simplifies installation and regular maintenance, both of which save time and money. By removing vandal-proof fasteners from one side of the shower panel, the unit swings away from the wall, providing easy access to components.

Nothing makes using a public shower more frustrating than not being able to adjust the water temperature except, perhaps, having the shower turn off every 20 seconds. A good solution is choosing models with metering devices. They ensure that showers are not left running while not in use, and they can be set to give users plenty of time to wash up.

The most reliable metering valves have electronics that are completely sealed from humidity and moisture. Some electronic valves offer the ability to preset timing from one to three minutes. These controls should also be sealed, along with the electronics inside the push-button pod. It is important to make sure water temperature for these devices is supported by a thermostatic mixing valve upstream.

To maintain temperature control, specify heavy-duty, pressure-balancing valves or thermostatic mixing valves. They not only protect the user from scalding, but they are extremely durable and vandal-resistant — saving water and utility costs as well as repairs.

Curbing the flow

Many local codes require that lavatories and faucets use a maximum of 2.5 gallons of water or less each minute (gpm). To meet water conservation requirements, public facilities contractors should choose newer spray heads that allow for easier rinsing with less water. Specifying low-flow showerheads and fixtures, as well as metered faucets and waterless urinals, can reduce overall facility water consumption by more than 30%. This can translate to major cost savings in water and sewer bills, as well as energy costs for heating water.

Installing green products and more efficient fixtures may add costs upfront, but their advanced technology will save money over the unit's life cycle. Newer fixtures as part of a restroom renovation also mean less maintenance and greater resistance against vandalism. ■

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Group showers are the popular and sensible choice where space is limited and a quick cleanup is the objective.

er is a way to relax, be pampered or massaged while they mentally organize their plans for the day ahead. For still others, a shower is pretty much just a quick way to get clean.

Although a lot of attention these days focuses on luxurious, multi-jet showers highly sought-after in hotels, spas and new or remodeled homes, a vast number of showers in use today are essentially the workhorses that simply freshen us up promptly and efficiently, perhaps after work or after working out.

Group showers: popular and sensible for many applications

For public applications where a quick cleanup is the objective — at work sites between shift changes, at gyms and health clubs, at schools and public bathing facilities — group showers remain a popular choice, especially where space is limited.

Group showers make good sense wherever users simply want to get clean and fresh before moving on to their next stop. Another popular application for group showers is at wading

they can shed soiled work clothes, then shower and change to streetwear before heading home or out in public.

Gyms and health clubs — In gyms and health clubs, many patrons arrive directly from work. After pumping iron or working out on a treadmill, an exhausted athlete's only thought is to get out of that wet workout wear, take a quick shower and change before getting back in the car.

Safety and privacy concerns

Occasionally, plumbing engineers and contractors tell us that some users have questioned whether group showers are as sanitary as individual showers. They cite concerns that “shared water” might splash or pool, and pass germs from one person to another. We've explored whether “shared water” does in fact pose such a health threat. We have not found a record of such complaints nor substantiation to support fears of contamination from sharing water.

In fact, the most common concerns we hear expressed about group show-