

SPRING 2023



Workplace Insights

Four Keys to Re-Designing the Workplace Restroom

For many building owners, the complexities and costs of restroom renovations mean that these areas tend to be put on the back burner when undertaking renovation or tenant improvement projects. Because of this, upgrading restrooms tends to be a generational project...something that owners often don't look at as being directly related to business at hand, or to their bottom line, and therefore something that they tend to defer. However, there is a great deal of intangible return that can be gained by doing this work. Goodwill, improved morale, greater accessibility, and increased sustainability are all significant motivations for undertaking a restroom renovation.

For those wishing to undertake a restroom re-design, note that, while building codes will require certain features and elements, designs for commercial restroom spaces can vary widely. We suggest keeping these four things in mind as you begin the process:

1. **Understand the Current State.** One of the critical factors when planning a restroom renovation is to analyze what the current state truly is, and determine what things are real challenges for people who are using it:
 - a. Is it accessible to those with disabilities? Many older restrooms are not designed to the universal

design standards of today. Bringing restrooms into compliance is a significant, and sometimes complex, issue. Even older facilities that are compliant with today's standards may benefit from newer technologies to provide easier access for all.

- b. Does it pass the "eye test?" Restroom interiors which are dated, gloomy, or which have finishes that have reached the end of their service life can reflect negatively on the overall workplace design. Brighter interiors with pleasant lighting and neutral palettes are typical traits of contemporary restroom design, and will blend well with corporate interiors that may change more frequently.
- c. Is odor an issue? HVAC systems, air flow, exhaust, and other factors are often less than ideal in older restrooms, and therefore may not be dissipating

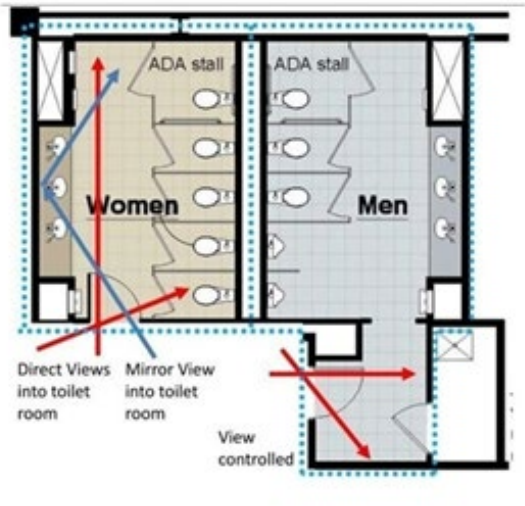
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and evacuating odors fast enough. Proper planning and location of exhaust, and balancing the air flow, can make a big difference in the environmental quality of these rooms.

- d. Is there enough acoustical privacy? Keeping sounds within the space is important, so these rooms typically benefit from a complete acoustic perimeter – including the walls of the plumbing chase that often divides a pair of restrooms. Providing an acoustic barrier, including sound attenuation insulation all the way up to the deck above, is a big help in giving these rooms an added element of privacy.



Room layout is important, and it starts with how one enters the space. The layout on the left looks great if you just look at stalls and sinks, but start outside the room and walk in. The women's room has direct views into the space from the corridor... far from ideal. Sightlines on the men's side are better, but the janitor's closet is part of the men's room, not ideal for cleaning staff who could be female. (Source: Minnesota AIA)

2. Durability. Everything selected for restrooms – finishes, fixtures, partitions, accessories – must be highly durable to withstand commercial cleaning protocols and high frequency of use. Plus, specifying durable materials and finishes with a longer functional service life means that they'll be replaced less frequently.

3. Sustainability. Restrooms are a great place to incorporate sustainable fixtures and components, including reduced-flow toilets, water-saving faucets, energy-efficient hand dryers, occupancy sensors for the lighting, and more.

4. Future-proofing. Given that restroom renovations tend to happen far less frequently than updates to other workspaces, it is important to include possibilities for the future in your re-design. From gender-neutral spaces to shared handwashing stations, there are a multitude of options to consider. In addition, though finishes like paint can be easily and cost-effectively refreshed to give the space a new look, other finishes – including tile, partitions, and counters – may be much more difficult or more costly to update. It can also be advantageous, therefore, to design these spaces as timelessly as possible to hedge against an 'outdated' look a few years down the road.

As noted, re-designing workplace restrooms is a great way to make such spaces more comfortable and pleasant for all. Doing so will create a more inviting atmosphere...one that can help elevate employee morale, productivity, and job satisfaction.



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