

# Paper please – we're European



The debate on the method we prefer to use to dry our hands after washing them is endless. Is it hand dryers, or do we prefer good, old-fashioned paper towels? Which process is more hygienic? Which is quicker? Intermetra Business and Market Research Group devised a survey to find out.

A recent survey carried out in four major European countries – France, Germany, Sweden and the UK – found that facilities in public toilets are extremely important for users, especially with regards to hand drying.

Looking at the issues surrounding the washroom, Intermetra Business and Market Research Group, found that hand washing is considered mandatory, however 28% of users of public toilets do not like to dry their hands if they cannot find a suitable hand drying device. Finding a suitable hand drying system is one of the most important factors when considering hygiene. Almost all respondents (96%) agreed that paper towels provide the best standard of hygiene.

Managers of companies and restaurants do not normally question their customers, staff or visitors on what facilities they want in the premises' toilets. However, the perception of the venue is greatly influenced by these basic facilities. The survey found that a washroom with the 'right' solution is highly appreciated by all and is seen as a 'nice business card', in other words, it helps build a positive view of the venue. When it comes to washing and drying hands, the majority of users have made it clear that they prefer tissue hand towels above any other system.

The new survey confirms that people are

usually in a hurry; consequently they do not want to queue in front of a dispenser and want to leave the washroom feeling clean and dry.

The consumer survey by Intermetra on behalf of ETS provides some very interesting insights. It was conducted among 2,000 people, male and female of all age ranges in four countries: France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The objective was to find out whether, why and how consumers wish to dry their hands after visiting toilets in public places.

## The 'right' device

Washing hands after a visit to a public toilet has become almost normal practice everywhere in Europe. The question is though: do we always dry our hands? The survey found 1% do not follow this routine. Germans have reconfirmed their profile as being the most rigorous Europeans: 88% will always dry their hands, whatever drying system is available. More than a quarter (28%) of those questioned will look first to see if there is 'a suitable hand drying system' before deciding to dry their hands. Women feel more strongly about this than men, especially in Sweden (42% vs. 27%) and France (41% vs. 29%).

If the availability of the 'right' device is mandatory for almost a third of the users, when then is a hand drying system considered 'suitable'?

Only 6% of all respondents attribute 'the dry feel' as the most important attribute of a hand drying device. The largest group, almost three quarters of all respondents (72%), put hygiene as the highest requirement on their list, whereas speed of drying is a priority for 22% of those people interviewed.

Overall, hygiene is considered the most important factor for liking or disliking a drying device by almost all (95%) respondents.

Textile towels that have already been used by others (72%) are considered to be totally unacceptable; as are unclean devices (59%). Tissue hand towels are seen as giving the highest level of hygiene (96%). This is confirmed again when systems are chosen for use by children in schools.

As hygiene is seen as the most important condition, two thirds (68%) of the people believe that tissue hand towels dry their hands the fastest, which is three times faster than pull down textile towels and five times more than hot air dryers. The driest feeling they achieve is from paper towels (50%). Hot air dryers (30%) are considered to be more efficient than pull down textile towels (18%).

The bottom line is that most users (63%) when questioned, put tissue hand towels systems, if that system is available. Less than half this percentage (28%) opt for hot air dryers and 10% for textile towels. When looking at the first and second choices, paper towels lead with almost all (98%) of the respondents. Pull down textile towels are considered the least suitable.

There is no surprise in the fact that Germans (88%), more than other nationalities (average 66%), stick to the rules and will dry their hands regardless of the device they find.

Three quarters of Swedes (73%) and Germans (75%) favour tissue towels as their preferred option, whereas the English are somewhat divided between tissue towels (48%) and hot air dryers (46%).

Last but not least, females are the most outspoken in their preference for tissue hand towels; in this Swedish women score highest of all (74%).

Figure 1: The most important attribute of a hand drying device

