



The Future for Gender-Neutral Restrooms

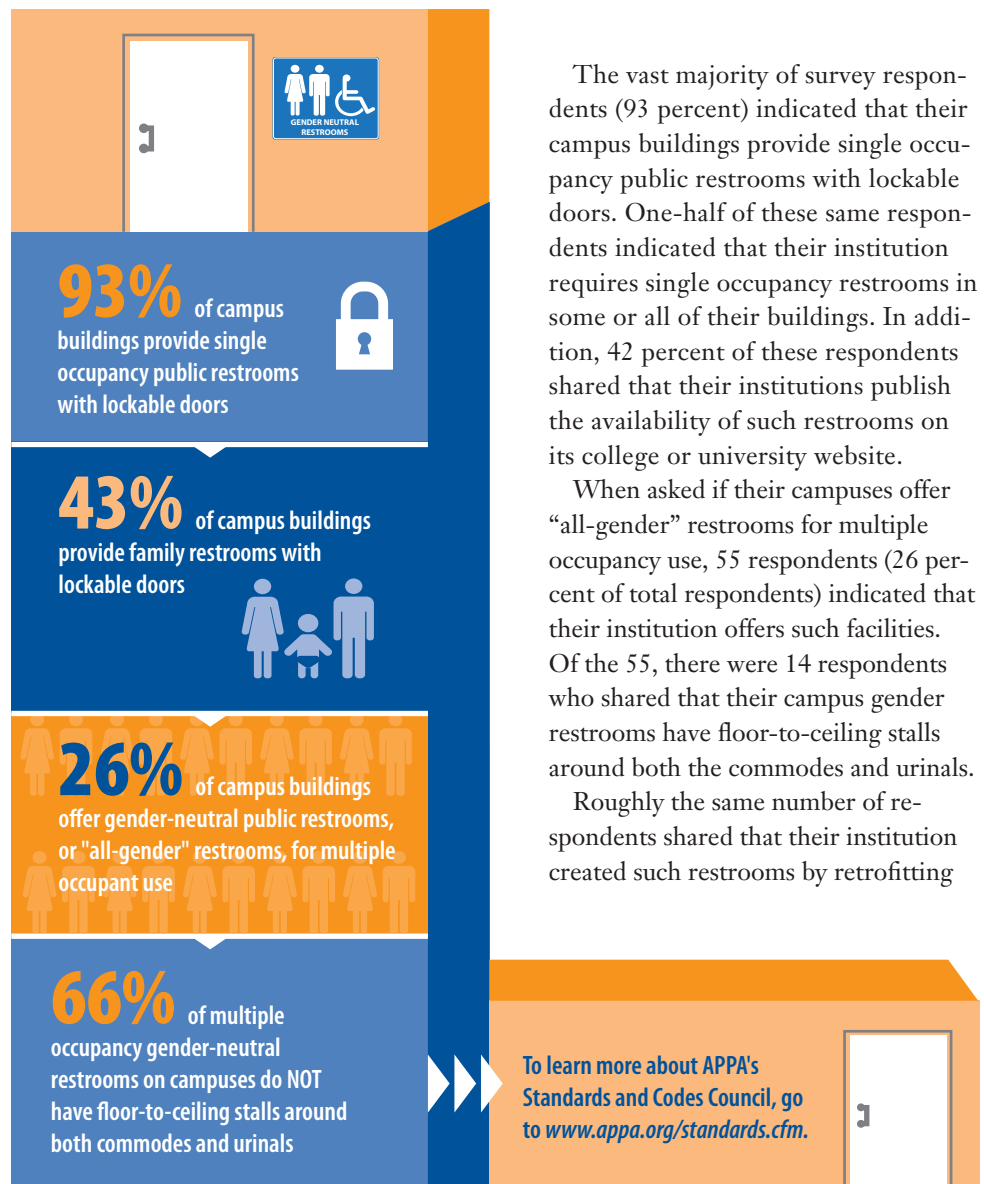
By John Bernhards

A number of colleges and universities are now establishing gender-neutral restrooms, by renovating existing facilities, making simple changes made to restroom signage, or both.

Gender-neutral bathrooms are commonly defined as single- or multiple-occupancy bathrooms with no gender distinctions. Such facilities are also commonly referred to as “all-gender” restrooms. There are more than 150 higher education institutions in the U.S. alone that currently offer gender neutral restroom facilities. Such restrooms are designed to welcome students of any gender and to alleviate uncomfortable situations for transgender students.

APPA SURVEY RESULTS

A recent survey among APPA member institutions was conducted by the APPA Standards and Codes Council, to establish some understanding of how college and universities are addressing requirements for all-gender restroom facilities. There were 217 responses received from the survey.



The vast majority of survey respondents (93 percent) indicated that their campus buildings provide single occupancy public restrooms with lockable doors. One-half of these same respondents indicated that their institution requires single occupancy restrooms in some or all of their buildings. In addition, 42 percent of these respondents shared that their institutions publish the availability of such restrooms on its college or university website.

When asked if their campuses offer “all-gender” restrooms for multiple occupancy use, 55 respondents (26 percent of total respondents) indicated that their institution offers such facilities. Of the 55, there were 14 respondents who shared that their campus gender restrooms have floor-to-ceiling stalls around both the commodes and urinals.

Roughly the same number of respondents shared that their institution created such restrooms by retrofitting

and converting what were previously identified as sex segregated restrooms. The performed retrofitting included adding or reducing the number of urinals and commodes. It also included the installation of floor to ceiling stalls, and changing the restroom signage to read “All Gender.”


IBC REQUIREMENTS

The International Building Code (IBC) defines requirements for the fixture count (i.e. the number of commodes and urinals) in restrooms based on building occupancy, and also mandates requirements for single occupancy restrooms. Changes to the IBC are considered once every three years,

through a hearing and review process administered by the International Codes Council (ICC).

Public hearings were held in Memphis, Tennessee this past April, where there were several proposed changes introduced that would have increased the number of single occupancy restrooms based on lowered building occupancy ratios. However, those proposals were not adopted at the hearings, and no changes to the IBC are now anticipated for adoption and use in the next version of IBC (the 2018 version).

It should be noted that, regardless of changes made to the IBC, any city or jurisdiction may choose to forgo sections of this model code and adopt its

own code changes to advance changes desired by the community at large. APPA member institutions may wish to carefully anticipate possible code changes to fixture counts, as well as changes to overall restroom design and possible retrofitting over time, as they plan for future construction and renovation projects. 

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