

# Washroom Report Summary

The current washroom situation crudely detracts from the learning and working environment in the McConnell and Frank Dawson Adams Buildings. The situation is potentially embarrassing to the university, and possibly actionable.

## Problems

- blocked plumbing, sewage overflow, 10 minute waits at peak usage times caused by inadequate numbers of toilet stalls for women.
- inadequate long-term maintenance (e.g. dirt encrustations, broken basins, toilets, urinals and light fixtures, running water, leaking tanks, odor problems, graffiti)
- poor or nonexistent signage (building users cannot locate the facilities)
- poor location of washrooms (e.g., long distances from high use areas to washrooms, no washrooms for men on floor 2 of McConnell, where large classrooms are located, inadequate washrooms for men and for women on floor 1 of McConnell, where classrooms and heavily used labs for undergraduate students are located). This increases traffic in elevators and stairs, causes plumbing problems due to overuse, and induces frustration-provoked graffiti.
- inadequate daily maintenance (e.g., no paper during working hours)
- basic design problems in many washrooms (e.g., lack of privacy in stalls, inadequate design for wheelchair access – door assists to enter but no door assists to exit, poorly located handles, functionally unusable rooms in spite of wide stalls)
- security problems, or perceived security problems, in womens' washrooms (e.g., poor lighting, access hole to McConnell utility areas through toilet stall in new womens' washroom in McConnell basement). Security in washrooms in McConnell and FDA is a particular concern since these buildings are heavily used after hours by undergraduate and graduate students working in laboratories and computing facilities. Security problems, or perceived security problems, in womens' washrooms effectively limit access of women students to events and educational facilities.
- atmosphere of inaccessibility created by staff only signs and locked washrooms barring those without keys.
- atmosphere of hostility toward women created by signs, slogans, pictures, icons posted on womens' washroom doors and in womens' washrooms. This is particularly a problem in the McConnell Building, where conditions compare unfavourably to other McGill campus buildings and to buildings at other universities in Canada and world-wide.

## Recommendations

- Involve the Office of the Dean of Students, the Office of Students with Disabilities, representatives of the various building users, maintenance personnel, and architects in further planning and prioritizing.
- Substantially increase (e.g., triple) the number of toilet stalls for women in the McConnell Building.
- Reduce squandering of staff and student time and morale on long travel times to washrooms from offices and labs by adding new washroom locations.
- Redesign the toilet facilities for men and women on the high use, lower floors of the McConnell Building.
- Work out a plan for daily maintenance so that washrooms are adequately supplied throughout the day, and blocked plumbing problems promptly noted and repaired. Contact information for washroom problems should be posted in each washroom.
- Work out a plan for regular but infrequent maintenance so that broken fixtures are eventually repaired, dirt encrustations removed, light bulbs replaced.
- Involve student groups in washroom maintenance. They could do washroom tours, report problems on a regular basis, remove cartoons and graffiti.
- Correct existing design problems (see full report for details).
- Correct existing security problems (see full report for details).
- Carry out a one-time massive effort to restore the condition of existing facilities to a reasonable level.
- Place signs in high traffic areas (e.g., in lobbies, near elevators and stairs) throughout the buildings indicating the locations of the washrooms.

The full report<sup>1</sup> discusses specific problems and recommendations in detail and offers basic observations and design principles for washroom planning.

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<sup>1</sup>Report on Washrooms in McConnell and FDA Buildings, Fall 1998, by Prof. Sue Whitesides, School of Computer Science, McConnell 318, tel. 7071, fax 3883, sue@cs.mcgill.ca