



City of Portland Green Purchasing Case Study

Portable Restrooms

Purchasing Green

Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) hosts numerous outdoor events, many of which require temporary, portable restrooms. In an effort to make greener choices, PP&R piloted the use of Nature Commode restrooms at their Movies in the Park and Concerts in the Park events in summer 2018. Nature Commode offers portable restroom services that include environmentally-friendly toilets, hand-washing stations, and on-site staffing.

Nature Commode supplied 3-6 portable restrooms at 17 events at 12 different park locations throughout July and August. At some events, Nature Commode toilets were the only restrooms available. At other events, there was a restroom building on-site and Nature Commode supplied supplemental units.

The Nature Commode experience is a little unconventional, but both PP&R and event-goers had overwhelming positive experiences. PP&R plans to continue to use Nature Commode for outdoor events in the future.

Benefits

Portable toilets traditionally use “blue liquid” consisting of dye, fragrance, and biocides (which inhibit bacteria growth) to control odor. Nature Commode replaces such chemicals with a natural alternative - sawdust from a local mill - thereby reusing a waste material. Sawdust, in combination with the ventilation provided by Nature Commode’s construction, effectively neutralizes odor.

Instead of bulky plastic, Nature Commode toilets are composed of steel and canvas that can be easily disassembled into a flat package, allowing a greater number of toilets to fit on fewer vehicles. Furthermore, the waste is transported in containers via a box truck, as opposed to pumper trucks needed for conventional portable toilets. Together, these aspects reduce fuel use associated with the service.

Nature Commode also sources environmentally preferable products to be used in conjunction with the toilets, including: certified organic hand soap made with 70% certified [Fair for Life](#) ingredients; certified organic hand sanitizer made with 62% certified Fair for Life ingredients; and 100% total recycled content toilet paper and hand towels.

Within the next few years, Nature Commode plans to develop a system to process all of the collected waste into a Class A compost.



Nature Commode units at a PP&R Concerts in the Park event

At a glance –

Who –

- Portland Parks & Recreation

Product –

- Nature Commode portable restroom service

Cost –

- Comparable to conventional portable restrooms

Benefits –

- Reuses a waste product
- Reduces fuel use
- Eliminates on-site chemical biocide use
- Minimizes vandalism and damage to site landscaping

“We would use this service again. They are friendly, there is little-to-no smell, and the experience far surpasses anything you would find in an ordinary portable restroom unit. Add to the fact that they are better for the environment and you can’t really get a better deal.”

Alex Diaz, Summer Free for All
Recreation Leader, Portland Parks &
Recreation

Cost

The cost for Nature Commode was comparable or slightly higher than the cost of conventional portable restrooms, depending on the vendor. However, PP&R thought Nature Commode was worth any small increased expense due to the environmental benefits of the product and that the company also provides an attendant to explain to event-goers how the toilets work and to service the toilets if needed.

Performance

According to Chariti Montez, supervisor for PP&R’s Summer Free for All program, event-goer reactions typically fell into three general categories: 1) “no thanks” (and they would instead wait in long lines for the one permanent restroom); 2) curiosity and “try anything once” (typically followed by surprise by how clean, pleasant, and odor-free the experience was); and 3) excitement from the get go due to the more sustainable nature of the service. Overall, PP&R received positive feedback from both staff and community members about their experience with Nature Commode.

The PP&R maintenance staff was particularly impressed that the Nature Commode restrooms did not stay overnight (or longer) like conventional portable restrooms. Because they can be easily dismantled, Nature Commode can break down and take away the units immediately following an event. Not having the units on site for long periods of time helps minimize costs associated with vandalism or destruction, as well as causes less damage to site landscaping.

Lessons Learned

One key to Nature Commode’s success was providing an on-site staff person at each event to explain how the toilets worked, answer questions, and ease any concerns people might have with using the restrooms.

Because of its canvas and steel frame design, this kind of portable toilet lends itself to one or two day events, but is not practical for instances where the toilet needs to remain on-site for a longer period of time. However, Nature Commode has recently developed a different model for construction sites and longer term installations, but the City has not tested this model yet.

■ December 2018

About Portland Parks & Recreation

Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) provides care to over 10,000 acres of parks and natural areas, and offers thousands of programs for all ages at its community centers, swim pools, and other recreation facilities.

For more information: *Charity Montez, Summer Free for All Supervisor
Portland Parks & Recreation, 503-260-5928.*
