

## Disabled toilets? They probably are

Many of them are certainly disabling. We really should be saying ‘accessible toilets’. Apart from being more accurate, it reminds us that they need to be exactly that – accessible – so that disabled people are enabled to retain their dignity and independence whilst doing what all of us take for granted.

Recent evidence shows that many supposedly accessible toilets neither comply with the guidance in The Building Regulations, Approved Document M 2004, nor do they meet British Standard BS 8300-2009. Some are just difficult to use but some are actually quite dangerous.

It may be difficult to appreciate exactly why some of the features provided in an accessible toilet are required and how important their positioning is. This note provides an explanation of some of the issues but it does not attempt to replace the excellent and much more comprehensive guidance provided in BS8300 and Part M of the Building Regulations, in accordance with which all accessible toilets should be designed.

### **Why is it so important to meet the requirements so precisely?**

What may appear to be a small and insignificant detail to some may pose a real element of difficulty or even danger to a disabled person. And remember not to think only of wheelchair users. Accessible toilets are useful for a broad range of people who are either permanently or temporarily disabled. The guidance in the Building Regulations and in BS8300 is based on many years of research and needs to be followed exactly because all of the requirements are important to someone.

To fully understand the importance of the requirements, you must put yourself in the position of a disabled person when answering the following questions.

#### **Q. Why is a standard height toilet pan unsuitable?**

A. The seat of a standard wheelchair is approximately 480mm above floor level. Standard toilet pans are around 430mm to the top of the seat. It may be possible to slide off of the wheelchair and drop onto the toilet seat. Getting back onto the wheelchair is a different matter. Even with good upper body strength, it is practically impossible for most people to raise themselves up by around 50mm and across by 600mm using arm strength alone.

The likelihood is that, having reached the toilet, you will be fully committed to using it so you go ahead and transfer from your wheelchair to

the WC. You are then faced with a couple of possibilities, neither of them attractive.

- You can pull the alarm cord for assistance (assuming there is one and you can reach it) and hope that there is someone monitoring the alarm.
- You want to be independent and don't want to cause a fuss so you try to transfer back to your wheelchair. So you pluck up the courage, try to launch yourself from the toilet seat across onto your wheelchair and only make it half way. You and your wheelchair topple over near the far wall where there is no alarm. What happens next? One can only imagine.

#### **Q. Why does the basin need to be so near the WC?**

A. Some disabled people need to wash their hands first before rearranging their clothing and transferring back to their wheelchair. To find out for yourself how important the position of the basin is, whilst sitting on a chair, lift your legs off the ground, stretch your arms out in front of you and see how far you can reach forward without losing your balance. You will find it is not very far. The basin and the tap really must be in the positions shown in the Building Regulations and BS diagrams.

The photograph below shows the correct positioning of a basin with the tap fitted on the corner nearest the WC. The corner tap position shown also helps people who may need to rinse out a bottle or container.

**Q. Why does the flush handle need to be on the side nearest the transfer space?**

A. The flush lever should be on the open side of the cistern (not on the wall side). You should be able to flush it using a hand, an elbow, or any other part of the body. Some people do it with their chin. If it is not on the open side, it will be impossible to reach from a wheelchair.

**Q. Why toilet tissues in preference to toilet paper?**

A. Some people can only use one hand, which can make the job of tearing sheets of paper off of a traditional toilet roll quite difficult. A toilet tissue dispenser, fitted in the correct position can make life so much easier for everybody.

**Q. Why is the type of rail important?**

A. The fold down rail should be easy to pull down and push up from a seated position. Some rails lock into the upright position and have to be physically lifted before they can be lowered which is not easy, for even the most muscular and agile of us, especially whilst sitting on the toilet with our back to it. Drop-down rails are available with a friction hinge, so that they can be adjusted to fold down effortlessly, without them falling down uncontrollably and frightening or injuring the user. The rails used should contrast with the surrounding walls – see photograph below.

**Access to the cubicle**

One of the most important points, and one which is often forgotten, is that none of the facilities described above are of much use unless the physical access to the compartment is good. Do please try to remember that all of the following points are vital:

- Sufficient manoeuvring space outside the door to the WC – 1.5m x 1.5m should be regarded as the minimum;

- The door should preferably open outwards but it should be positioned carefully so that it does not obstruct a circulation route or inconvenience other users of the building.

- Door furniture needs to be able to be used by people with limited dexterity or strength. It may be useful to ask whether it can be operated with a closed fist.

- The door furniture must also contrast with the with door for easy recognition

**Additional Facilities needed in the cubicle**

- A mirror located either above the wash basin or on the opposite wall to enable people to see themselves in the standing or seated position.
- A shelf located between the basin and WC to hold a colostomy bag.
- A disposal bin

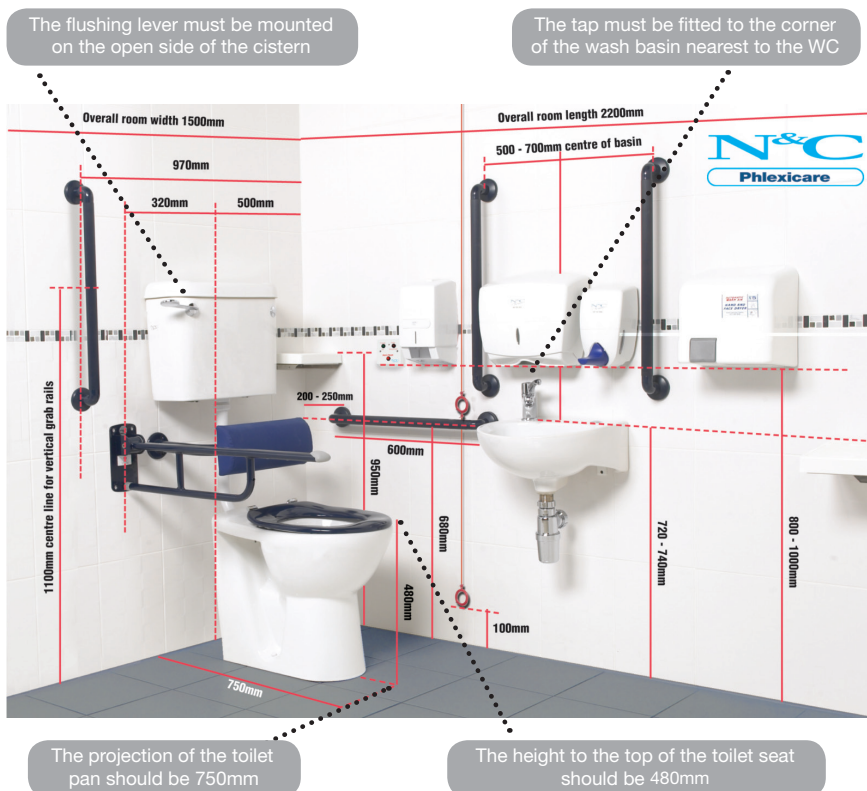
Remember, the above points are only by way of explanation of some of the main features important to disabled people. It is vital to refer to Part M of the Building Regulations and BS8300 for comprehensive and detailed guidance on the design of accessible toilets and their fittings.

**Now look at some failures**

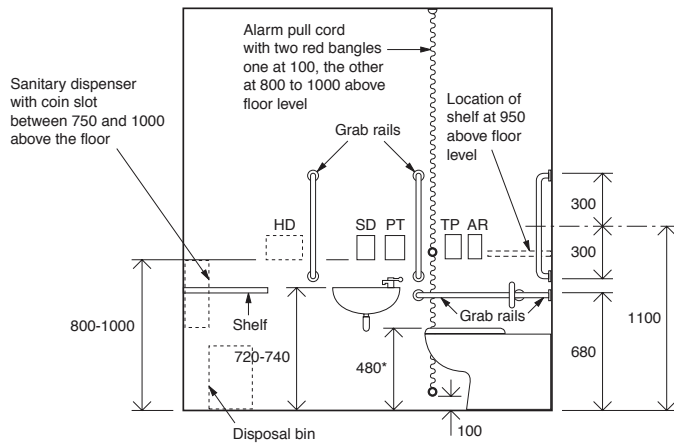
Visit this site for examples of the non compliant installations which have been photographed.

<http://futurebuild.weebly.com/m-packs-good--bad.html>

The photograph below is a good example of an accessible toilet



## Heights and arrangement of fittings in a unisex wheelchair-accessible toilet



\*Height subject to manufacturing tolerance of WC pan

HD: Possible position for automatic hand dryer (see also Diag 21)

SD: Soap dispenser

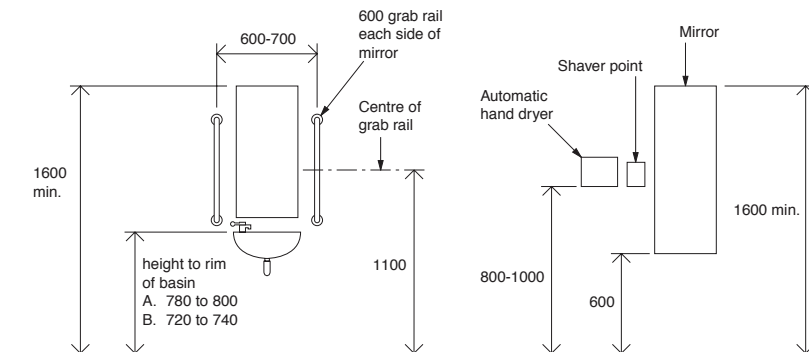
PT: Paper towel dispenser

AR: Alarm reset button

TP: Toilet paper dispenser

Height of drop-down rails to be the same as the other horizontal grab rails

## Heights of various fittings in toilet accommodation



Height of independent wash basin and location of associated fittings, for wheelchair users and standing people

- A. For people standing
- B. For use from WC

Mirror located away from wash basin suitable for seated and standing people (Mirror and associated fittings used within a WC compartment or serving a range of compartments)

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