



WHERE TO PEE?

Nature's calling shouldn't be a cringe moment for trans people but it often is. Technology and Portland are helping to improve things, though.

As trans people go about their lives, there's the daily dilemma of where to pee? Aside from our homes, and perhaps workplace and social routines, "where to pee?" is the question trans people are most likely to ask ourselves when we're out and about. Unfortunately, we usually just mumble in silence and look for the lesser evil of the choices we usually have — a male or female restroom — knowing that using one or the other could result in being shouted at or violently attacked.

Trans people have been physically harmed for using the seemingly safer female restroom as evidenced by a recent east coast attack on a transgender fast food customer that was captured on videotape and closed-circuit TV. This nationally reported incident resulted in lengthy jail terms for the two female attackers.

Gatekeepers can also get in the way of safe bathroom decisions. Across the river in Vancouver, a bartender denied a trans woman access to the women's restroom, which later led to local media coverage. While television news cameras were rolling, the bartender explained she has no problems with trans customers, but drew the line at allowing the trans patron usage of the ladies' room because the trans woman is "still a boy and she wants to go in the woman's restroom..." Although the trans patron has since filed a complaint with that state's human rights commission, it shows that trans people not only have to face difficulty with other users of public rest rooms, but also with those that own them.

Gender-neutral restrooms, of course, are the solution, and down the road there will be more of them as the paradigm of public restrooms changes as a result of transgender advocacy.

In Portland, a number of businesses and agencies are already on board with gender-neutral bathrooms. The Q Center, Reed College, PSU, SMYRC, and Portland Loos already have gender-neutral sites. A Portland business, Floyd's Coffee Shop, adopted the idea after a customer suggested it.

A website — safe2pee.org — collects information about gender-neutral

or trans-safe bathrooms around the country and makes it available to anyone at no cost. I found that Portland appears to be in the top five cities with reported gender-neutral bathroom sites. I spotted numerous Portland businesses, retailers, malls and movie theaters in the database. Browsing through the Portland locations listed will bring peace of mind to many trans people in the city.

In addition, there is an app for the iPhone that taps into the safe2pee data. By utilizing GPS, the TranSquat app can bring up the gender-neutral locations closest to you. It's community driven so that users can add or update the database. Those new to Portland, or on the go in another city, can use this app to make safe choices. Trans man Billy Bolt developed the app to help fund his sex reassignment surgery — a really clever idea. There isn't an Android version at this time, but I wouldn't be surprised if one came out down the road.

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To help make the where to pee(?) dilemma a thing of the past, trans and the entirety of the LGBT community, as well as their allies can make a routine habit of urging places and businesses they frequent to adopt gender-neutral bathroom policies. Not only might some businesses like to be ahead of the curve on providing this access if given information of the need, others could be persuaded of the financial sense it makes when shown the safe2pee database, especially if their location is likely to be suggested to potential customers using the TranSquat app.

Nature's calling shouldn't be a cringe moment. We now have options and solutions. More will come our way if we speak up. Thanks for reading. Your thoughts and comments are always welcome! §

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