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## **PARENTS SOUND OFF ON SCHOOL RESTROOM CONDITIONS**

### ***Expert Warns of Risks Associated With Unclean, Unsafe, Unstocked Restrooms***

ROSWELL, Ga. (October 15, 2002) – With the school year well underway across the United States, attention is turning from the traditional three “Rs” (reading, writing and arithmetic) to the fourth “R” – school restrooms. A recent national survey of parents identified a number of problems associated with the restrooms in their children’s schools.

In fact, the problem is so severe that close to 20 percent of middle and high-school students admit to their parents that they avoid the school restrooms due to dirty or unsafe conditions. This is according to the survey conducted on behalf of Kimberly-Clark Professional by Opinion Research Corporation.

“The state of school restrooms in this country is a national disaster,” says Dr. Tom Keating, coordinator of Project CLEAN (Citizens, Learners and Educators Against Neglect), a national effort dedicated to safe, sanitary school restrooms for all school children. “You have conditions that are so bad, kids are literally holding it in all day.”

### **When Good Kids Go To Bad Restrooms**

In addition to “kids holding it in all day” -- a problem identified by 21 percent of parents surveyed -- other problems associated with dirty, unstocked or unsafe school restrooms include:

- Vandalism and graffiti – cited by 38 percent of surveyed parents as the most likely result of dirty, unstocked or unsafe school restrooms.
- Health problems in students – cited by 22 percent of surveyed parents.

“It can be difficult to draw a direct link between cleaner bathrooms and academic achievement,” Keating says. “Intuitively, however, we know that students will pay closer attention in class if they’re not worried about ‘holding it in’ until school is over. And, when school restrooms are clean, safe and well-stocked, the overall school is perceived by students as cleaner and more appealing.”

### The Scope of the Problem

Keating, whose calling as “The Bathroom Man” has taken him to schools across the country, recalls that in some school bathrooms, it’s easier to find the toilet paper hanging from the ceiling than in the stalls. In others, toilets are chronically backed up, obscenities are scrawled on the walls, and cigarette butts litter the sinks.

“I’ve seen schools in which toilet tissue is hung outside of the stalls or in which teachers hand out toilet paper to the students because they think the students will waste or destroy the tissue unless it’s regulated,” he says.

The lack of basic restroom supplies was a problem echoed by parents in the survey. In fact, 14 percent of parents surveyed said their school-aged children report that their restrooms lack basic supplies like toilet paper, hand soap or hand towels. Moreover, 13 percent of parents surveyed said their kids report that some of the toilet stalls in their school restrooms don’t even have doors on them. In general, “filthy” restroom conditions were cited as their children’s complaints by 14 percent of parents surveyed.

### Solving The Problem

Keating says, that while some students can be quick to blame school custodians for the condition of their restrooms, the responsibility for keeping the restrooms clean lies with everyone from students and their parents to faculty, staff and school administration. That’s one of the reasons Project CLEAN tries to mobilize all of these groups when it works with schools to improve attitudes, behaviors and physical conditions in school restrooms.

“We even have corporate America looking at this issue,” he says, referring to a program between Project CLEAN and Kimberly-Clark Professional, a Roswell, Georgia-based supplier of restroom supplies.

“It all comes down to respect,” he concludes. “Kids have to respect their school restrooms as if they were their own, because, in a sense, they are. And faculty, staff and administration have to respect the students as young adults who can be trusted to take care of their basic, biological needs in an acceptable setting.”

#### About the Survey

These results are based on a telephone study conducted by Opinion Research Corporation among a national probability sample of 269 U.S. adults who are parents or guardians of public school children in seventh to twelfth grades. The study was conducted September 12-16, 2002 and has a margin of error of plus or minus six percentage points.

#### About Project CLEAN

Project CLEAN (Citizens, Learners and Educators Against Neglect) is a service of a non-profit education organization and is dedicated to promoting safety, cleanliness and hygiene standards in public schools. For more information, visit [www.project-clean.com](http://www.project-clean.com).

#### About Kimberly-Clark Professional

Kimberly-Clark Corporation is a leading global manufacturer of tissue, personal care and healthcare products. Kimberly-Clark Professional provides tissue and towel products, skin care products and industrial wipers for workplace settings. For more information, visit [www.kcprofessional.com](http://www.kcprofessional.com).

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