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Waterless Urinals - Pros and Cons

There are many people who hate the very idea of waterless urinals, and others who have had bad experiences of them. If you browse the web, you will doubtless find comments saying that "they stink" and recommending "don't go waterless". There are waterless urinals that smell, generally because they have not been properly installed or maintained. Of course, it is highly likely that you would have come across many flushed urinals that smell, for precisely the same reason. Whether waterless or flushed, some simple measures have to be taken to prevent odours. Most smell problems emanate from around the urinals due to poor cleaning and are completely unrelated to the type of urinal in use. As waterless urinals are still relatively new to most people, they tend to attract the blame for washroom odour problems, in most cases without any justification.

Why many people hate waterless urinals

- **Old systems were unreliable:** In the 1990s, there were some systems sold that were flawed in their approach and implementation. They tended to let odours from the urinal waste pipes vent into the washroom.
- **Capabilities oversold:** In a bid to generate sales in a difficult market, some potential users were told that all you had to do was put some device or chemical compound in the urinal bowl and turn the water off. This approach was never going to work for the user.
- **Zero Flushing Can Highlight Pipework Problems:** Even in new buildings, the standard of pipework configuration can fall well below sensible standards, and even water regulations. Gentworks engineers find that around 10% of washrooms need some remedial works prior to converting urinals to waterless use. Common problems include waste pipes that are running uphill, have multiple right angled connections and inadequate rodding access so they have never been maintained properly. In addition, some vents and overflows are incorrectly connected into the urinal waste pipes and floor drains are inherently smelly. Whether or not urinals are to be converted to waterless, such issues should be resolved to avoid problems with blockages and odours. Converting to waterless can solve some such problems but exacerbate others.
- **Incorrect Maintenance:** It is vital to follow the correct maintenance regime for the type of waterless urinal used. For microbiological systems, this includes weekly dosing with compatible chemicals. Use of drain clearing acids will 'kill' the enzyme producing microbes and disable the system.
- **Incorrect Cleaning:** This is the most common cause of failure for waterless urinals. Regular use of cleaning products containing strong acids, alkalis or bleach will destroy the 'good' bacteria in microbiological systems and degrade the gel in barrier systems. Even valve systems can cease to operate correctly due to a strong cleaning chemical effecting the flexibility of the valve.

PROS	CONS
• maximum possible water savings, typically 20% to 30% of total site water consumption • reduced incidence of blockages • no need to maintain cistern, flushpipes and flush controllers • no floods to cause damage	• unfamiliar concept • bad experiences from the past • simple but essential weekly maintenance • cistern and water supply pipes should be drained and capped as indicated by legionella risk assessment (see "dead-legs")