

Portable Toilets

Popular outdoor destinations attract higher numbers of visitors, and receive more impact to the surrounding natural resources. This can lead to concentrations of human waste and other refuse, which pollutes the environment and presents a serious human health hazard. Left unchecked, these conditions may force land managers to restrict access, or implement user regulations designed to protect the natural resources and enhance public health and safety.

Public restroom facilities are not always available, especially in remote areas. Visitors to some public lands may be required by law to carry a portable toilet system for the removal of human waste. Portable toilets (also called “pack it out” toilets) are already familiar to many outdoor enthusiasts, including river rafters, sea kayakers, rock climbers, backpackers, and others. Any visitor to the public lands can help improve their favorite destinations by carrying and using a portable toilet system as a routine part of their outdoor activities.

Portable toilet systems are now available in a variety of designs, to accommodate a wide range of outdoor activities. With a little research and preparation, you will be able to select a toilet system that is right for your activity and group size.

Types of Portable Toilets

A pack-it-out toilet system is typically defined as one that is portable and containerized. Ideally, a good toilet system can also be washed and re-used. In addition to many excellent commercial products, effective toilets can also be improvised using inexpensive materials available at most hardware or sporting goods stores.

All toilet systems consist of some type of sturdy, leak-proof container, and either a liquid or dry base material. The job of the container is to effectively enclose and transport the waste until it may be properly disposed of. Containers can be purchased commercially or improvised, and are typically made of metal or plastic. Five-gallon buckets with gasket lids are one common example. For user comfort, such containers can be fitted with a toilet seat during use, and a sealing, leak-proof lid for transport.

The job of the base ingredient (either liquid or dry) is to reduce odor and make waste disposal and cleanup easier. Liquid-based toilets commonly use water and a chemical treatment (preferably non-formaldehyde), and are often designed to be compatible with RV dump stations for convenient disposal and cleaning. Dry-based toilets may utilize potting soil, kitty litter, or other dry ingredients instead of a liquid, and are frequently lighter and less likely to leak in the event of mishap.

When reducing bulk and weight is a high priority, single-use, individual bag products are available which consist of a heavy-duty zip-locking bag containing a special powder. The powder inside the bag turns liquid to gel on contact, neutralizes odors, and helps to break down the waste. Many of these bag products are approved for disposal in a landfill (check local laws to determine what is legal for use in the area you will be visiting). Care must be taken with all bag systems to prevent small animals from tearing holes in the bags, so having a sturdy transport container is a good idea. The small size and light weight of such bag systems makes them particularly well-suited for hikers, kayakers, ATV riders, bicyclists, and others who may require a small, lightweight portable toilet solution.

Toilet Tips and Waste Disposal

Remember that any toilet system is only effective if it is used, and people will be more willing to use the toilet if it is comfortable, and maintained in a clean, sanitary condition. Toilet components should be kept readily accessible, and should be set up in a location that offers plenty of privacy, at least 100 feet from water. Toiletries such as tissue paper, flushable baby wipes, plastic bags, disinfectant, and sanitizing hand gel can be kept in a waterproof box or bag nearby. Have soap and water available so that hands can be washed after using the toilet. Only human waste and toilet paper should go in the toilet container. Trash and feminine hygiene products should be placed in a separate garbage bag.

Improper disposal of toilet contents only makes the problem worse. Portable toilet systems must be disposed of properly, at designated locations or fixtures provided for that purpose, such as RV dump stations and authorized vault toilets. For waste disposal and cleaning of the container, consider assembling a box of supplies that you might want to have on hand, such as gloves, bleach, disinfectant, brushes, bags, etc. Planning ahead will make the job much easier and minimize inconvenience.

The use of portable toilets greatly reduces user impacts to campsites and natural resources. Before you leave, stop and look behind you to see that you have done all you can to minimize the traces of your visit and are leaving a clean slate for the next visitors.

Because laws vary from place to place, always check with local land management agencies to determine what the specific requirements are for the area you plan to visit. With a little forethought and preparation, you can do your part in helping to keep your favorite outdoor places clean, healthy, and ready for future generations. Thank you!



Portable Toilet Links

For those who wish to purchase a toilet system, most outdoor sporting goods stores (e.g., Cabelas', REI, Sportsman's Warehouse, NRS, Cascade Outfitters, Campmor, Joe's, Big 5, etc.) carry a variety of portable toilet products and accessories available for purchase online or at retail locations.

The following is a partial list of portable toilet manufacturer internet websites. This content is provided for general reference information only. The BLM does not endorse or assume liability for any business or product listed or absent. For more information, or to update this list, please call the BLM River Station at Minam: 541-437-5580.

<http://www.eco-safe.net>

Complete washable, reusable portable toilet systems.

<http://www.m-m-industries.com/catalog/index.htm>

Sturdy, sealing plastic buckets in a variety of sizes.

<http://www.metoliusclimbing.com/wastecase.htm>

Lightweight, sturdy bag container developed by rock climbers.

http://www.mtntools.com/cat/mt/necess/mt_bigwallcan.htm

Lightweight, sturdy container developed by rock climbers.

<http://www.outbackpack.com>

Lightweight, sturdy cardboard commodes for use with a liner bag.

<http://www.packinpotty.com>

Compact, folding toilet for use with a liner bag.

<http://relianceproducts.com>

Bucket commodes, liner bags, waste treatment products.

<http://www.thepett.com>

Bag systems, folding toilets, privacy tents. Makers of "WAG BAG Toilet in a Bag" products.

<http://www.traveljohn.com>

Bag systems, bucket commodes, folding chair commodes, privacy tents. Makers of "Solidwaste Collection Kit" bags.

<http://www.urinbiz.com>

Bucket commodes, bag liners, waste treatment products.

<http://www.whennaturecalls.com>

Bag systems, bucket commodes, privacy tents. Makers of "RESTOP" products.

