

# Toilets at work

**A report on workers' experience of toilet access  
and facilities**

**November 2024**



## Toilets at work: why it matters

Access to toilet facilities should be a fundamental right for all workers, regardless of where or how they carry out their job. Toilets should be of adequate capacity, be of easy access, and suitable for all.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case, as the evidence in this report, based on a survey of trade union members, demonstrates.

Access to toilets is a fundamental workplace need. When workers lack adequate access, they may delay using the restroom, leading to serious physical health issues over time. It also causes stress and distraction, a serious risk in safety-critical roles where workers must be able to concentrate on the job at hand. Regular restroom breaks are also crucial for staying hydrated and maintaining bodily health, particularly in physically demanding jobs. However, teachers, drivers, postal workers, firefighters and many others report urinary tract infections, kidney strain, digestive issues and other health complications as a result of having to 'hold it in'. There is an additional concern for pregnant, menopausal or disabled workers.

In the most extreme cases, a lack of access to facilities has resulted in serious physical harm. In 2022, a train driver died after being hit by a passing train, he was suspected to have stepped out of the drivers' car to urinate on track due to a lack of facilities on-board.

Beyond physical health, limited access to toilets impacts mental wellbeing. Workers who are unable to take restroom breaks as needed often experience stress, anxiety, and discomfort, which can lower morale and lead to decreased productivity.

For mobile workers, being away from a physical workplace can cause serious barriers to access toilet facilities. There are laws and regulations which set out the requirements in fixed and temporary workplaces, but there are none concerning workers on the move. Since 2010, the number of public toilets in local communities has fallen by 22%.

In a TUC survey analysed here, hundreds of workers report urinating and excreting in bags, bottles, buckets and bushes for lack of access to a toilet. This poses a serious concern to workers' health, safety and dignity at work. It also puts some workers at risk of arrest for public indecency.

Some of the findings in this report are shocking and must sound an alarm to employers and policy-makers to put things right and ensure all workers, regardless of workplace or role, can use a toilet when they need to.

## The survey

The survey was distributed by the TUC to trade union members via email lists held by the TUC's affiliated unions and social media channels. The survey was open from 17 October to 13 November 2024. A total of 4126 people completed the survey. The survey included 4 questions with scripted options on the extent and quality of toilet provision and access during working time. It also included the opportunity to write a longer narrative account of

the specific situations, problems and experiences people are having. In addition to open-text contributions, respondents were also given the opportunity to attach photographs to the survey, to help illustrate any commentary about toilet access or conditions.

Respondents came from the following unions.

<b>Union</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
CWU	904
UNISON	670
NASUWT	354
UNITE	239
PCS	138
NEU	136
RMT	127
UCU	127
FBU	124
RCM	117
GMB	109
ASLEF	83
PROSPECT	66
USDAW	66
COMMUNITY	44
SOR	34
RCPOD	30
EQUITY	29
MU	20
EIS	15
BFAWU	15
NUJ	13
TSSA	12
FDA	11
CSP	11
BECTU	10
NAPO	4
NAHT	3
POA	2
NAUTILUS	2
BDA	2
ACCORD	2
NHBC SA	1
AEGIS	1
BALPA	1
ARTISTS UNION	1
URTU	1

The above totals 3,524. A further 602 respondents identified themselves as either not belonging to any union, or not a union affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. Percentages shown in this report are from the total number of respondents.

Respondents who did not indicate union membership work in the following sectors:

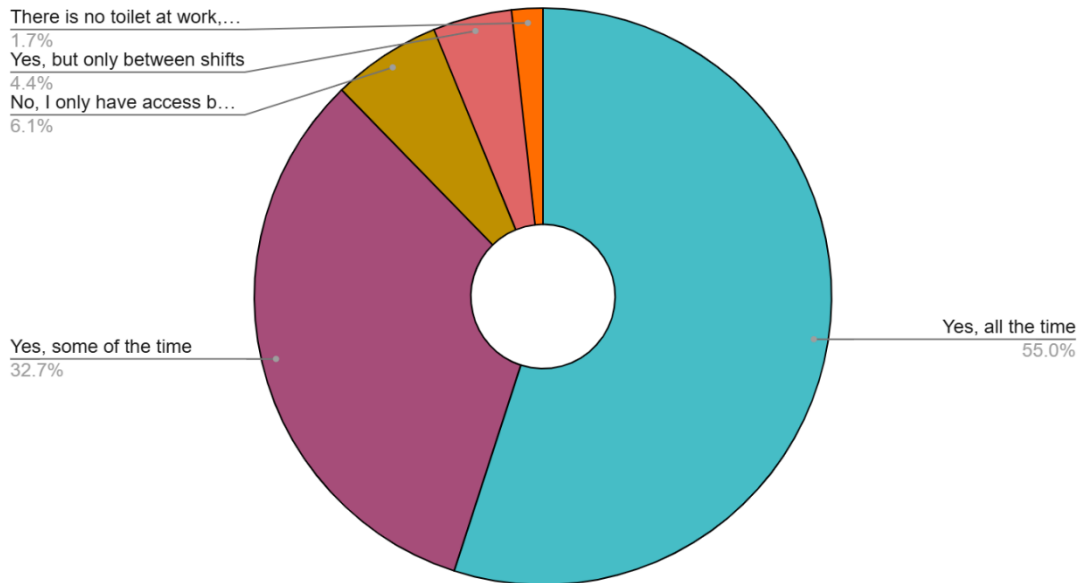
agricultural	4
arts	7
civil service	17
construction	8
education	89
engineering	32
finance	21
healthcare	106
hospitality and leisure	23
IT	12
legal	21
local government	20
manufacturing	9
media	5
other private sector	69
other public sector	58
Postal service	18
property	4
publishing	5
retail	30
scientific research	5
social care	11
tech	6
third sector	38
transport	2

## Lack of access

Nearly half (45%) do not always have access to a toilet at all while at work. Workers who reported this problem include postal workers, firefighters responding to an incident, and construction and trades workers on-site or on-call.

Only 55% reported having access to a toilet while doing their job 'all the time', with the rest reporting varying degrees of limitation. Nearly a third (32.67%) have access for 'some of the time' while they work, but altogether 12.2% of respondents say they must wait for long periods before being able to reliably access a toilet. Of those, 4.4% can only use a toilet between shifts, and 6.1% can only use a toilet before or after work, while 1.7% say there is no toilet to speak of.

## Do you have access to a toilet while doing your job?



Although consistent access is available to most workers, a significant number are unable to relieve themselves when necessary.

A substantial portion of workers spend time working on a mobile basis, i.e. not in a fixed workplace. Many spoke of the challenges they face in finding accessible toilets during their shifts, and noted a reliance on public restrooms, which are often unavailable or distant from their work areas. Some mobile workers recognised the fall in the number of public toilets made available by local authorities.

**"I work part in an office and part outside in the field, and there are no adequate toilet facilities available in the field."**  
– postal worker

**"I rely on access to public toilets of which there are very few since councils started closing them decades ago."** – mobile library driver

**"I, like many workers who work alone in remote areas have very limited access to toilet facilities. We rely on public toilets being open. Many of these have been closed by councils."** – local government worker

**"On train access can be limited due to numbers of passengers using the facilities, sometimes making it impossible for staff."**  
– rail worker

## Toilet alternatives

The most disturbing responses came from workers who had no access to toilets whatsoever. This included those where there are no toilets in their place of work, for example, on a train, or where their job requires them to be mobile and not within proximity to a toilet, e.g. a delivery driver.

The survey reveals that some workers are resorting to makeshift or alternative arrangements. This often includes undignified solutions, such as using a bucket, a bottle or a bag. Workers even report being explicitly told by employers to use these arrangements:

*“As a mobile worker there is not always access to toilet/welfare facilities. Have previously been advised to use a bucket in the van by management.”*

- Some workers, especially those working in remote or field-based roles, mention using bottles when toilets are unavailable. This points to significant gaps in access, as these workers are unable to leave their posts or do not have any on-site restroom facilities.
- Workers in transit or isolated areas (e.g., railway staff, outdoor workers, or those in rural locations) appear to be the most affected. Their work setups lack adequate sanitation provisions, leaving them to find alternatives to fulfil a basic human need.
- Using makeshift facilities not only compromises workers’ comfort but also risks their health and well-being. Reliance on such methods could lead to physical strain, discomfort, stress and long-term health issues, particularly for workers who regularly face such conditions.
- The need to resort to such measures can be deeply dehumanizing and demoralizing, potentially affecting overall job satisfaction and wellbeing. It emphasizes the need for employers to prioritize access to clean, functioning, and accessible toilets for all workers, regardless of their location.

This feedback in particular highlights an urgent area for improvement in workplace health and safety standards, and for basic welfare provisions that support workers’ dignity and physical health.

**“A lot are using bottles in the back of the van but don’t want to raise the issue**

– postal worker

**“We have to use plastic bags if doing number 2s, or bottles for number 1s”**

– a train driver

**“I have had to use bushes, ask members of the public to use their facilities, and even use toilets that were in a building that has been an incident, i.e. is on fire”**

– male firefighter

**“this is a photo of my toilet. It comes to work with me, in my rucksack”**

– a postal worker



**“I have to keep a bottle, funnel, wipes and hand sanitiser in the back of the van in case my bladder can't hang on until the next available pub or public toilet.”- female postal worker**



**“I have a supply of toilet paper & baby wipes in my van for when I need!”**

– a delivery driver

**“It is more difficult to pee outside when the trees and bushes drop their leaves” – local government worker**



**“My toilet is a B&Q bucket, a blue roll, cold (Stored) water and hand soap in the back of my van. I try to save ‘no 2s’ for being near a big supermarket that has toilets, but nature doesn't always allow it. It's disgusting, but that is the reality”- emergency plumber**



**“I weed in the street twice today”**

– mobile worker

Some female mobile workers pointed to the gendered nature of these 'alternatives' – while male colleagues were able to urinate in a bottle, this was not possible for them, and had a knock-on effect on productivity and ability to meet targets:

*"In order to use a toilet I have to go miles out of my way at least once every shift to use a toilet when they just urinate into bottles, and this impacts on my productivity. We are expected to have an equal output but I have less time to do this in than they do" – a female delivery driver*

While still unable to access public toilets, other mobile workers explained how they had established agreements with local businesses or service providers who allowed them toilet access:

*"once we leave the depot, we all rely on public toilet facilities (of which there are no council ones anymore), so pubs, betting shops, some doctors surgeries and supported accommodation are our only options" – a delivery driver*

*"The employer makes no provision for facilities during a 5-hour round. Thankfully a local older person's community flats let's us use their toilet" – a postal worker*

Several respondents identified themselves as disabled, explaining how a lack of access to public toilet facilities created a particular access need, lack of dignity, or worsened symptoms of their health conditions.

*"there are no facilities apart from a dirty mechanics garage who kindly lets me use his toilet. In my position with a foot of bowel removed a hernia and out for 5 hrs it's pretty disgusting." – female postal worker and cancer patient*

**"having had bowel cancer I get less warnings. It's an utter disgrace, I have had to go in bushes"**  
- a female delivery driver

## Lack of breaks

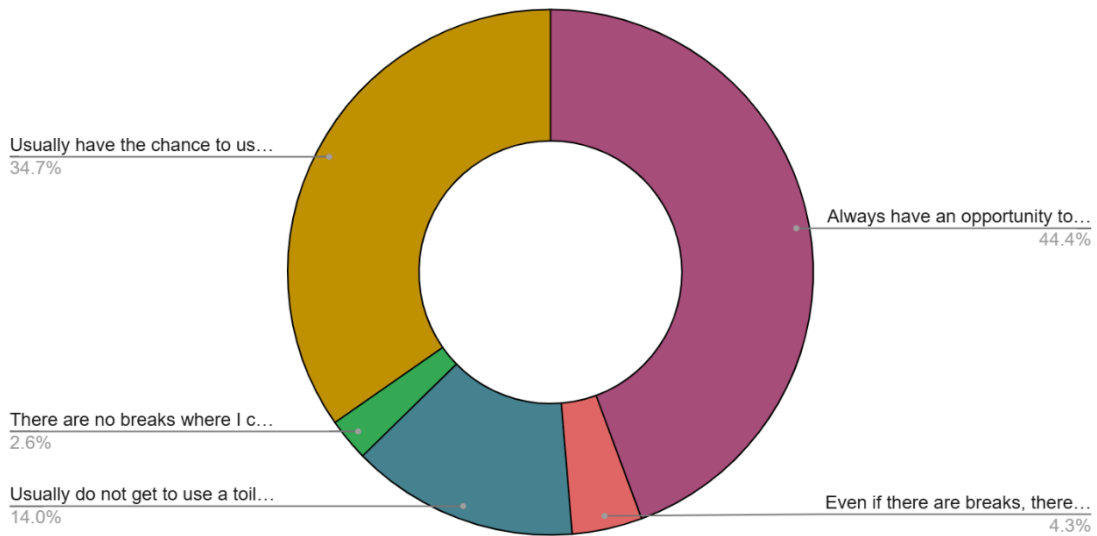
More than half of respondents reported not always being able to use the toilet when they needed to. This included workers where the toilets are accessible and functioning, but there are limits on access due to the structure of the working day.

In answer to the question 'Thinking about breaks at work, do you...', workers responded:

- Always have an opportunity to use a toilet if needed: 44.4%
- Usually have the chance to use a toilet when needed: 34.7%
- Usually do not get to use a toilet when needed: 14%
- Even if there are breaks, there is no toilet to use: 4.3%
- There are no breaks where a toilet can be used: 2.6%



Thinking about breaks at work, do you:



**“they tell us that toilet breaks are built into our time allowance for our pick rate, but some people are scared to go to the toilet because of this rate”**

– warehouse worker

Workers reported not having scheduled breaks that allow them to access a toilet when needed. This reflects workplace cultures or policies prioritising continuous work or productivity, potentially at the expense of basic needs, for example in warehouses where workers are expected to meet targets within timeframes and can work in fear of punishment for taking ‘time out’.

In other sectors, such as education, there can be a wait to use a toilet as the workforce is unable to

leave a particular worksite due to supervisory and safeguarding duties. Teachers often have limited time to access toilets, as their break schedules are short and tightly packed with duties. Many of the teachers who responded reported waiting for hours to be able to use a toilet between lessons, and having to travel long distances around a school or college to find an available toilet. Where workers’ breaks coincide, this can cause particular problems

**“there’s just one toilet for 10 staff and our breaks are always at the same time. So sometimes you have to wait and you might end up not being able to use it before lessons restart.”**

- a teacher

**“Often insufficient loos available. because we all have the same break time, we often have to spend the whole break queuing to use the loo.”**

- a teaching assistant

of congestion: everyone needs to use the toilet at the same time, and either spend the entire break queueing or are unable to use the toilet in the allocated time.

As well as too few breaks, and inadequate breaks, some respondents reported being disciplined for taking time out of work to use the toilet. This is a particular concern during pregnancy, menstruation, or for those with disabilities which might require them to take a longer toilet trip.

*"I suffer with IBD, even though I have toilet facilities at depo, if I get stuck on a train without a toilet, it results in me using a bucket as a toilet" – a train driver*

*"Some women have been pulled up for taking too long when it's not their break."*  
– a retail worker

*"We have so little time between classes; we're sometimes holding it for hours,"*  
– a teacher

*"Sometimes facilities set up honey-waggon a long walk from the set, and getting a chance to nip off and use them becomes impossible for long periods of time"*  
– an actor

### **'Holding it in' and health effects**

Many highlighted the physical discomfort and stress that come with not being able to take regular toilet breaks during their shifts. Workers frequently described having to "hold it in" for extended periods, leading to physical pain, fatigue, and long-term health concerns such as urinary tract infections and digestive issues. For those working in roles with limited access to nearby toilets, or without adequate breaks to use them, this lack of timely access not only impacted their physical health but also left them feeling anxious and distracted. Several respondents pointed out that the fear of reprimand for taking unscheduled breaks adds additional stress, making them feel as if their basic needs were secondary to the demands of productivity. Several reported being dehydrated due to purposefully limiting their fluid intake to avoid 'needing to go'. This includes in workplaces where working in conditions of high temperatures is common, e.g. in the fire service and driving trains.

The comments also revealed how the lack of toilet breaks disproportionately affects female employees, especially those in male-dominated industries or roles that lack gender-specific facilities. There appears to be a general lack of recognition for the additional needs of female employees to use toilet facilities for menstruation, and that there is no capacity for 'holding it in' when it comes to menstrual blood. Female workers noted that the absence of

**"During a night shift I don't drink as I should as there is a great lack of facilities at an incident. This goes against hydration policy, but I don't want to wet myself in front of a male orientated workforce"**

- female firefighter

**"I am having treatment for kidney stones. It started during COVID when there was no access to toilets on round (even the GP surgery I delivered to wouldn't let me use their loo!) so I had to limit my drinking."**

– female postal worker

sanitary supplies or female facilities often forces them to seek alternative arrangements, which is both time-consuming and uncomfortable. This is particularly challenging during menstruation, as the lack of both access and privacy contributes to heightened stress and discomfort.

Some respondents indicated that they regularly had to resort to unsanitary solutions, such as using makeshift restroom facilities in their vehicles. Several female respondents shared experiences of 'bleeding through' at work while on their period as a result of being unable to access a toilet or sanitary ware. Some workers said employers did not seem to realise that they had no control over when or how much they would bleed, and so could not always 'be prepared' with their own supply of sanitary items.

The impact on morale and well-being was a recurring theme. Many respondents expressed frustration and demotivation stemming from the sense that their basic human needs were being overlooked. Workers reported feeling undervalued and dehumanised when denied the dignity of regular restroom access.

Emergency service workers, such as firefighters and paramedics, reported how employers sometimes refuse or fail to deploy welfare vans (for example, portaloos and mobile washing facilities) during an incident. Some made comparisons with the police force, which they identify as being more responsive to these needs.

**Several female respondents shared experiences of 'bleeding through' at work while on their period as a result of being unable to access a toilet or sanitary ware.**

**"We have poor access and no time to use toilets. I end up with UTIs and my period leaking regularly"**  
– a teacher

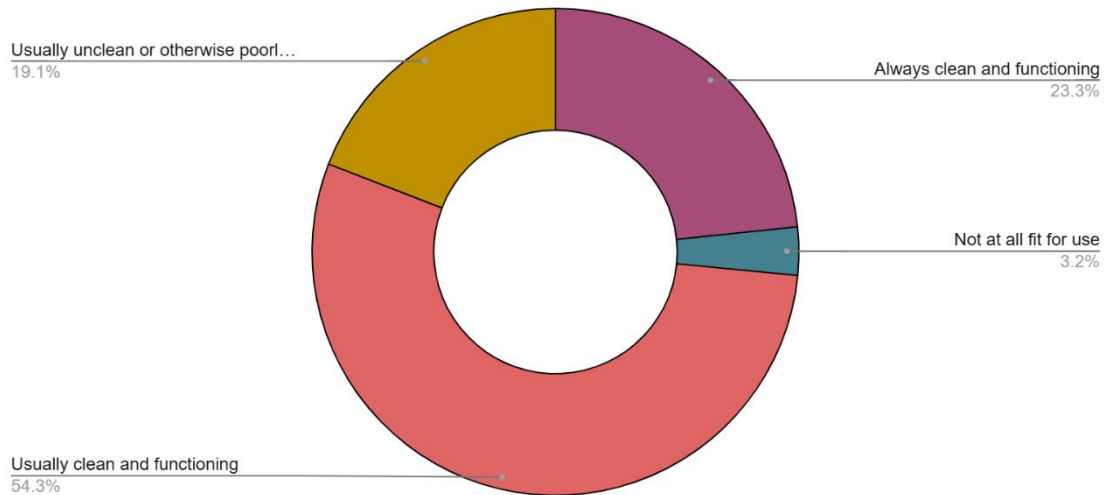
**"The distance to travel to cubicles can be a challenge. Sometimes I struggle to get there on time. I always wear incontinence protection due to this"** – a teacher

Female workers highlighted the disproportionate impact that a lack of public toilets had, citing how male colleagues found it easier to find alternatives, however unpleasant. Some older workers highlighted how bladder function has decreased with age.

## **Unsanitary and poor conditions**

The survey data reveals a mixed but concerning picture regarding toilet facility conditions across various sectors. While some workers report that their facilities are always clean and fully functioning, a substantial number face hygiene challenges that impact their well-being and dignity at work. Of those who do have toilets at work, over half (54.3%) indicate that their facilities are "usually clean and functioning," which, while acceptable, still leaves room for improvement. However, only 23.3% report consistently clean and fully functioning

facilities, suggesting that reliable hygiene standards are less common. Alarming, 19.1% describe their facilities as "usually unclean or poorly functioning," and 3.2% even label them as "not at all fit for use," showing that a significant proportion of workers struggle with substandard conditions.



- Sector-specific analysis indicates that workers in education, postal, and delivery roles report the most significant challenges with cleanliness and functionality. Comments from these sectors reveal common problems, such as blocked or out-of-order toilets, lack of hot water, and inadequate access to sanitary supplies.
- The need for improved workplace standards for cleanliness and hygiene in these sectors is apparent, with calls for consistent access to functioning, hygienic facilities that meet basic needs.
- Comments frequently highlighted the absence of essential items such as hot water, which compromises basic hygiene, especially for roles that require regular hand washing.
- While some toilet facilities were not unclean, they were in a general state of disrepair. One respondent pointed to suspected disturbed asbestos:



*"this is a picture of the gents toilets" – **call centre worker***

*"notice the urine ingrained on the floor and in the urinals... they say there is no money to upgrade" – **telephone engineer***

## Sharing facilities

While most workers who have access to a toilet could count on dedicated 'staff' toilets, there are some who report having to share. Workers were more likely to report issues of uncleanliness and poor sanitation if they were sharing toilets with people other than their co-workers. For example, in health, transport and education, many respondents reported having to share toilets with patients, passengers and children, who they deemed less likely to keep the toilets in good condition. Healthcare workers reported overcrowding and high demand in shared facilities, which often led to queues and reduced cleanliness, and increased levels of stress.

*"It is unbelievable the state we find toilets in. They leave gum in the urinals, poo all over the walls." – **a teacher***

*"Company fully aware but not doing anything to improve toilet facilities." – **road transport worker***

*"People are frequently failing to properly dispose of hazardous waste like medical equipment or sanitary items which is a hazard but we have nowhere else to go" – **a railway worker***



*"On train toilets are often dirty and people smoke in them and use drugs, they are also used by a lot of people" – a **train driver***

*"more often than not they lock themselves out of use. Station toilets are few are far between that we have access to. We are encouraged to drink and eat healthier but we can't because we don't have access to clean staff facilities throughout our shifts. Often time is a factor as you do not have time to go to the toilet." - **train driver***

*"Many other risks come with toileting. Drug use. Sexual favours for drugs and money. Infection control, human products." – **an NHS worker***

*"Toilets are sometimes available, but they're often shared with the public and not clean. We end up holding it in for hours." – a **postal worker***

*"It's uncomfortable sharing facilities with students, especially when we're expected to maintain professionalism. We need separate, clean toilets." – a **teacher***

*"The toilets at my store are filthy, and there's always a queue," – a **retail worker***

## **Female toilets and sanitary facilities**

The survey asked about the availability of sanitary items in workplace toilets, e.g. pads and tampons. Thanks to unions and campaigners, there has been an increase in the number of employers who now offer this, however, most do not. Unlike toilet paper, sanitary ware is not covered by welfare regulations. The survey responses reveal notable gaps in the provision of sanitary items (such as pads or tampons) at workplaces.

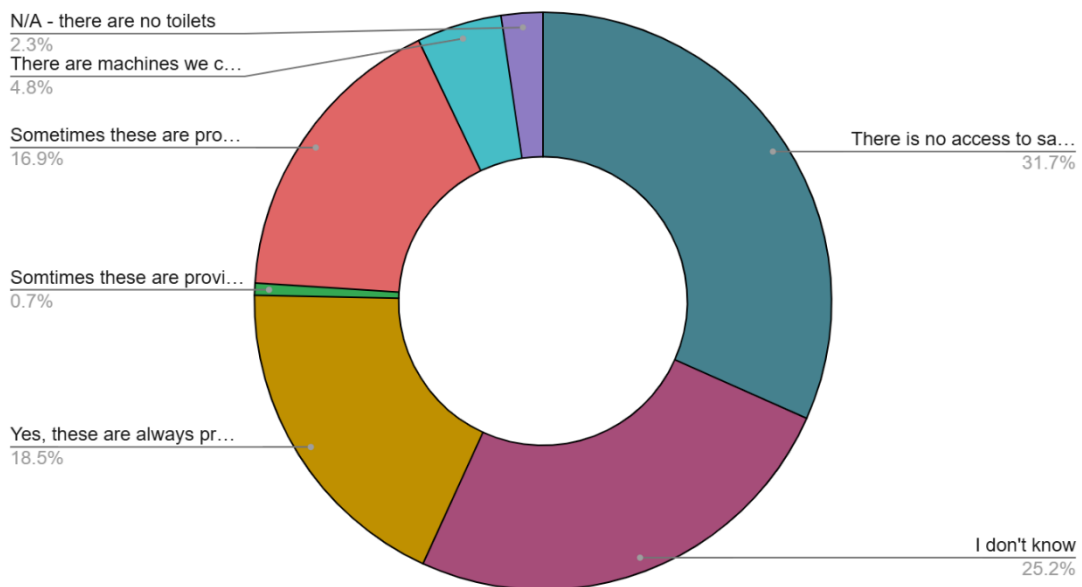
- 31.7% of respondents reported having no access to sanitary items at work, indicating that many workplaces do not provide essential hygiene products for employees. A further 25.2% did not know, implying they are not using female toilets

where these might ordinarily be expected to be found, and/or that there is a lack of clear information or communication about available facilities and provisions.

- Only 18.5% confirmed that sanitary items are "always provided," while 16.9% indicated that these items are "sometimes provided," reflecting inconsistency in availability.
- A small percentage (4.8%) noted that machines for purchasing these items were available, while 2.3% indicated that there were no toilet facilities at all, let alone sanitary provision.

These responses underscore that access to sanitary items in the workplace is inconsistent, leaving many workers without basic provisions and unable to rely on the employer even if the commitment is there. Additionally, the significant proportion of respondents who don't know if such items are available suggests that workplaces could benefit from clearer communication about these provisions.

### Are you provided with sanitary items, e.g. pads or tampons?



A significant 8% of respondents used the open text function to mention the provision of female toilets, with most expressing a preference. Many noted that female toilets were already provided in their workplace. Some respondents mentioned that management had failed to consult the union or wider workforce when making changes to these provisions. Existing regulations are clear on employers' duty in this area, but this is not being met in all circumstances, with an insufficient number identified particularly in male-dominated

**“Anxiety about my period became so bad that I went on the pill. I don't like the side effects but it means I can not have a period and I don't worry about leaking” – a teacher**

workplaces, for example in the construction industry and the fire and rescue service. In education, teachers reported schools having only one female toilet and having to queue for long periods to use it during a school-wide break time. Not only toilets, but shower facilities were also identified as inadequate. In workplaces that provide showers, the arrangement often lacks adequate privacy, with multiple showers grouped in open spaces or shared areas.

*"There is limited access to female toilets in fire stations, and shower facilities are often shared."*

*"I am a female firefighter. We used to have separate showers, but now we are expected to share facilities."*

## Key Challenges

Access to toilet facilities is fundamental to a healthy and safe workplace, but too many are facing:

- **Health risks:** Holding urine or delaying bathroom visits can lead to infections, digestive issues, dehydration, and long-term health problems.
- **Hygiene and privacy:** For some, access is limited to outdoor or makeshift facilities, lacking in privacy, cleanliness, and basic hygiene.
- **Period dignity:** Female workers, especially in male-dominated industries like the fire service, may face additional difficulties due to inadequate facilities and the wider workforce faces a lack of sanitary provision.
- **Safety concerns:** In industries where workers are isolated (e.g., transportation or security services), accessing facilities can pose a safety risk, particularly if they need to leave their vehicle or post to find a restroom.
- **Psychosocial:** For many workers, the lack of reliable access to a clean and functioning toilet when necessary can cause occupational stress, as well as the pressures of having to share, go quickly during a break, or while being monitored.

## What the law says

Reps wishing to raise concerns about toilet facilities and access may wish to consult existing legislation and regulation binding employers.

### *On access and facilities*

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 employers must ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees, and maintain the workplace so that it is safe and without risks to health. They must also provide adequate facilities and arrangements for welfare at work.



In addition, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 require employers to

- Provide suitable and sufficient sanitary conveniences and washing facilities at readily accessible places. The Approved Code of Practice states that minimum numbers should be provided depending on the size of the workforce
- Keep them clean, adequately ventilated and lit
- Provide hot and cold or warm water in washing facilities, soap and clean towels or other methods of cleaning or drying
- Provide showers if required
- Provide separate facilities for male and female users unless each facility is in a separate room with a lockable door and is for use by only one person at a time

The Education (Schools Premises) Regulations 1999, which apply to primary and secondary schools, require separate washrooms (including sanitary facilities) to be provided for the use of staff and students.

### *On breaks*

While the HSE does not specify exact guidelines on the frequency or duration of toilet breaks, it underscores that workers should have access to toilet facilities when needed. Therefore restricting access to toilets can have negative health implications and may violate health and safety regulations.

Under the Working Time Regulations 1998, workers are entitled rest breaks at work: an uninterrupted 20-minute rest break during the working day if they work more than six hours a day. However, these rest breaks are separate from toilet breaks, and employers should not count toilet breaks as part of the statutory rest periods. Employers have a duty to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of their employees, which includes providing reasonable access to toilet facilities as needed.

Disability and sex discrimination legislation may also apply, depending on circumstances.

## **What needs to happen?**

There are several improvements required to ensure all workers have consistent access to clean toilet facilities. Much of what is required in fixed workplaces is covered by existing regulations, but too many employers are failing to meet their duty. For mobile workers, there are also changes which require action from local and national governments.

### *Steps for Employers*

- **Provide adequate facilities:** Employers must (by law) provide suitable and sufficient toilets and washing facilities, i.e. enough clean, ventilated, suitably lit facilities, provided with hot and cold water, soap and a means of drying hands. They must also meet existing regulations relating to the ratio of toilets to workers, ensuring there are enough toilets for all workers, at all times. For mobile workers, employers should provide access

agreements with businesses and local authorities along their routes, and apply pressure to local authorities to provide or re-open public facilities.

- **Design work with workers' welfare needs in mind.** Whether it's train models with staff toilets on board or a working day structured to include breaks that allow for adequate toilet use without penalty, employers must centre workers' fundamental access to welfare facilities when designing all aspects of work, the workplace, and the structure of the working day.
- **Always consult with staff:** Ensure the workforce, including any union health and safety reps, are included and consulted on any proposals relating to toilet facilities. Put toilet facilities on the agenda for OSH committees and communicate improvement plans to workers. Encourage an open culture where workers can report facility issues without hesitation, knowing their concerns will be addressed.
- **Maintain cleanliness and hygiene standards:** Implement a regular cleaning schedule for all restroom facilities and address maintenance issues promptly to avoid prolonged periods of inaccessibility.
- **Provide sanitary products and disposal options:** Stock all necessary sanitary items in toilet facilities, with clear disposal options for hygiene products.

### *Steps for government*

The TUC has a long-standing demand for a change in the law to give workers a specific right to go to the toilet whenever they need it and without detriment, and to strengthen regulations to include mobile workers, ensuring all workers have the right to welfare facilities, whatever their job. We also want to see:

- **Funding for public facilities:** The cuts to public toilet facilities is the most urgent barrier facing mobile workers' access. National and local governments must increase investment in public toilets, particularly in high-density work and transit areas, providing accessible options for workers on the move.
- **Enforcement of regulations on welfare facilities:** Existing regulations are clear, but these are not always met, and many employers know there is little chance of an inspection from the regulator. Health and safety regulators, including HSE and local authorities, need the necessary resources to be able to enforce regulations, which must start with a reversal of the cuts to HSE's budget since 2010.
- **Clarity on break time requirements:** For the Health and Safety Executive to clarify existing "reasonable access to toilet facilities" rules to specify that in all but exceptional circumstances, workers can choose to use a toilet when they need.

### *Steps for local authorities*

- **Open more public toilets:** Expand the availability of public toilets in key areas where delivery, transport, and field workers operate, ensuring facilities meet high cleanliness

and safety standards.

- **Form partnerships with local businesses:** In the meantime, invite local businesses to become toilet champions and provide restroom access for workers who otherwise lack facilities, possibly offering business incentives for participation.

## Tips for Union Safety Representatives

Toilets are an issue that affect every single worker, in one way or another. Unions have demonstrated that access to toilets is a major concern across sectors, and a key issue in the organising agenda. Union health and safety reps can work with members to push for improvements. These are some ideas to get started.

**Consider risk assessments:** Access to welfare provision is a question of occupational health and safety, so should already be on workplace risk assessments. But are there specific risk assessments required for certain colleagues, for example those with a disability? Are employers meeting their new duty to carry out individual risk assessments for pregnancy?

**Conduct a survey and gather evidence:** Start with a survey in your own workplace to gather feedback on current toilet conditions, access, and breaks. This can highlight widespread issues and create a compelling case.

**Document Incidents:** Encourage workers to document incidents where they were unable to access toilets when needed or found them in unsanitary conditions. A log of incidents is valuable evidence.

**Raise the issue at health and safety committees:** Bring up the issue at every health and safety meeting, keeping it on the agenda until resolved. If you don't have a committee, establish one: safety reps have the right to sit on it.

**Know and Reference Legal Standards:** Highlight the relevant regulations, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) standards, which mandate readily accessible, clean, and functioning toilets.

**Occupational health risks:** Point out that poor toilet access and hygiene can lead to urinary tract infections, digestive issues, and occupational stress, creating a health risk that employers are legally obliged to mitigate. There are also safety concerns to consider where dehydration causes drowsiness, or needing to use the toilet can affect concentration.

**Use group actions:** Workplace petitions or group actions, like an "all-together break," where workers take breaks simultaneously, can highlight the importance of adequate restroom time without singling out any one worker. Use union newsletters, social media, and events to raise awareness about poor toilet facilities and access in the workplace. You could set up a testimonial wall in common areas (or a digital version) where workers can anonymously share stories of their experiences, making it harder for management to ignore.

**Co-ordinated inspections:** Do you have multiple safety reps in the workplace, possibly from different unions? Work together to take a co-ordinated toilet inspection action, report the results back to the employer, but also to the wider union membership to encourage involvement in a campaign.

**Involve the wider community:** In settings like hospitals or schools, train stations and shops, you can engage patient, parent, customer and passenger groups. Support from the broader community can strengthen pressure on the employer.

**Demand comprehensive facility assessments:** Request regular facility assessments from employers to ensure they meet legal and industry standards for hygiene, accessibility, and privacy.

**Promote reporting mechanisms:** Establish clear channels for workers to report issues related to toilets and welfare facilities, and monitor employer response times.

**File a formal complaint:** Mention potential health consequences and refer to HSE guidelines. Union reps can make direct contact with the Health and Safety Executive concerning legal breaches using [turepconcerns@hse.gov.uk](mailto:turepconcerns@hse.gov.uk). Highlight specific violations or safety concerns in advance

### Recent campaign examples:



- In May 2024, community group Acorn campaigned successfully for a local authority to re-open public toilets.
- In November 2024, bus drivers in Unite launched a bill of rights, demanding access to toilet facilities and adequate rest breaks.
- In February 2023, a construction employer was fined thousands of pounds following HSE intervention, after workers raised the alarm about a toilet facility which was not flushable, had no door, window coverings, sink or soap.

*For any questions about this report or the survey, contact [healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk)*