

'Not so satisfied' with hawker centres' cleanliness: Survey

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Residents here are satisfied with the cleanliness of public spaces like MRT stations and HDB town centres, a new survey has found, although hawker centres came in for some flak.

The Public Cleanliness Satisfaction Survey was done from late last year to March this year, and involved 2,000 Singaporeans and permanent residents aged 21 and above. And though nearly nine in 10 said they were generally satisfied with the cleanliness of public spaces they frequent, the numbers differed for the 20 categories of spaces.

Satisfaction was highest for train stations - both MRT and LRT stations - and roads, standing at 97 per cent and 95 per cent respectively.

"The floors of MRT stations are spotless and well-maintained, especially the ones of newer underground train stations," said 19-year-old Samfrey Tan, a third year media and communication student at Singapore Polytechnic who takes the train daily.

But satisfaction was lowest for cleanliness of hawker centres, and public spaces after events such as concerts and sporting events, at 60 per cent and 59 per cent respectively.

Professor Paulin Tay Straughan, a Singapore Management University professor of sociology (practice), and Dr Mathew Mathews, a senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies, headed the survey, which was fully funded by the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources.

Dr Mathews explained that commuters and road users have been "well socialised to keep from littering, and that is partly because of enforcement action, such as fines".

The situation in hawker centres, however, was different.

Said Professor Straughan: "Considering the number of people who frequent hawker centres, it is unlikely that the army of cleaners can keep up with clearing tables and keeping the tables clean without patrons also pitching in."

The survey also assessed social behaviours related to public cleanliness.

It found that only 35 per cent cleared their own food utensils at hawker centres most of the time or all the time. Some 49 per cent only did so sometimes, while 16 per cent never did so at all.

Public Hygiene Council chairman Edward D'Silva said one reason why some people do not return their trays could be that tray return facilities are not conducive for patrons to use.

"Many older hawker centres and foodcourts do not have proper tray-return facilities. If they do have, they are not very visible and located in inconvenient locations," Mr D'Silva said.

He has proposed to the relevant authorities to better incorporate such facilities in future hawker centres.

The survey also showed that 33 per cent of respondents said they threw away their litter inappropriately sometimes, with 12 per cent doing so frequently.

Most of the respondents believed that Singapore has become much cleaner than before, with 53 per cent indicating that Singapore was much cleaner compared with five years ago, and with 11 per cent thinking that Singapore was less clean. Some 36 per cent reported no significant change.