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Geberit Group

Project Spotlight: Massachusetts Department of Recreation

How the Massachusetts Department of Recreation Prepared its Restrooms for a Safer Reopening During COVID-19

Like most organizations, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation plans were turned upside down by the arrival of COVID-19 in early 2020. State parks were locked down in the initial phase of the governor's Stay at Home order before residents were permitted to use the parks again for walking and hiking. However, most of the Department's facilities, including the restrooms, remained closed to the public.

"The arrival of COVID was the perfect storm," explained John Larsen, Director of Facilities Trades. "Because of the virus and the lockdown, many of our other big projects for the year were either shut down or postponed. As a result, the Department of Recreation had the budget and time on its hands to get creative."



The Department of Conservation and Recreation manages over 450,000 acres of natural resources throughout the state of Massachusetts, including the state parks, forests, historic sites, lakes, ponds, reservoirs, and more. In addition to preserving the state's natural resources, the Department has numerous facilities, including restrooms that require regular maintenance and upgrades.

"The restrooms at our campgrounds, labor yards, swimming pools, and public recreation buildings needed some work and upgrades, especially the faucets- over 1,600 of them," Larsen explained. "We had been considering this for some time, but COVID provided the opportunity to get the work done in the public's interest."

"As a nature preserve and camping site, the demands of our public restrooms are specific," said Jon Walsh, Institutional Maintenance Foreman for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. "Some of our guests can get kind of rough with the equipment. So, we needed faucets durable enough to put up with whatever the public dishes out and are also easy to repair when necessary. We were also very aware of COVID-19's impact on our hygiene practices."

"In addition to durability, the faucets needed to work well in sand and saltwater environments," added Larsen. "The arrival of COVID also made sanitation a primary concern - we wanted to reduce the number of surfaces that people have to touch wherever possible."

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John Larsen,
Director of Facilities Trades



Durable and Reliable Sanitation

After extensive research on potential faucet brands and models that would meet the needs of their facilities, Larsen and Walsh settled on the E-Tronic® 40 faucet from Chicago Faucets. Tim Cossette, an Account Manager at F.W. Webb Company, Fitchburg Branch, played an important role in helping with the research.

Cossette, a master plumber himself, participated in bidding on the project. "I set up a zoom call to go over the faucet choices that would work for them based on their criteria," he said. "We had Chicago and Emerson Swan the Chicago rep on the call, and we sent samples ahead of time as we were doing the zoom call so we can go over them 'virtually.'"

"We were really all over the place in the faucet brands we used before this," explained Larsen. "My good prior history with Chicago Faucets products is what brought us back to the company and helped us standardize the E-Tronic® 40 in our facilities. The faucet just checks all of the boxes in terms of durability, easy maintenance, and, most importantly, cleanliness in the age of COVID. We had a different Chicago Faucets product in mind before receiving their advice from that zoom call Tim Cossette set up. That helped the decision process along nicely."

The touchless E-Tronic® 40 faucet is available in both AC & DC versions and incorporates several features for dependability and convenience. A dual-beam infrared sensor means that the faucet activates reliably without the need for any surface contact, meeting Larsen and Walsh's requirements for health and safety during COVID-19. In addition, the faucet's hermetically sealed, above-deck electronics grant a higher level of durability and easier maintenance, a must-have in the Department's high-traffic public restrooms.



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Reopening Safely for the Summer

"Spring and summer are when our facilities have high traffic, so we wanted the installation process, comprising about 1,600 faucets at all of our sites, to be completed before then," said Larsen. "We worked on installation extensively at the beginning of this year. Our goal is to have the project complete this year by the time the campgrounds reopen."

"It has been a very smooth process so far," added Walsh. "All of the work has been done in-house with a team of thirty-seven people. The team has been wonderful working through this and came to work every day with no reservations. The E-Tronic® 40 is fast and easy to install, and this is no doubt helping us to meet our timeline as the state begins to reopen and people become more active outdoors."

"It is really about doing what we can to make the camping and the outdoor experience more pleasant, sanitary, and safe," Larsen concludes. "Normally, when you think of a public campground restroom, those are not the descriptions that come to mind. The pandemic gave us the opportunity to upgrade our restrooms and make the spring and summer outdoor experience just a little bit more comfortable. Chicago Faucets products are playing a big role in helping us achieve that as we move to a future beyond COVID."

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CF2177 06/24