

Changing Times for Changing Places

Recently, there have been changes to the legislation which covers building regulations with regards to accessibility, which will see a huge increase in the number of Changing Places in the UK. Mark Sadler, UK sales manager at Ropox, explained some of the changes, and his views on them.



What difference will these changes make?

While they could result in an increase in enquiries to companies such as Ropox, to be honest, these latest changes will have little effect for anything up to three or four years, especially for service users. But five years from now, I believe people will look back at the current situation with regards to changing facilities and realise how inadequate they were. The reason for such a delay in seeing the benefits is that the new rules will only apply to new build planning applications which

are submitted after 1 January 2021, and we all know how long an initial submission can take in coming to fruition, especially for something as substantial as a shopping or leisure centre, motorway services, or theatres.

The big difference is that, at the moment, incorporating a Changing Places facility is optional and seen as best practice, but from 1 January next year it will be compulsory in all new building applications of certain types which are submitted after that date.

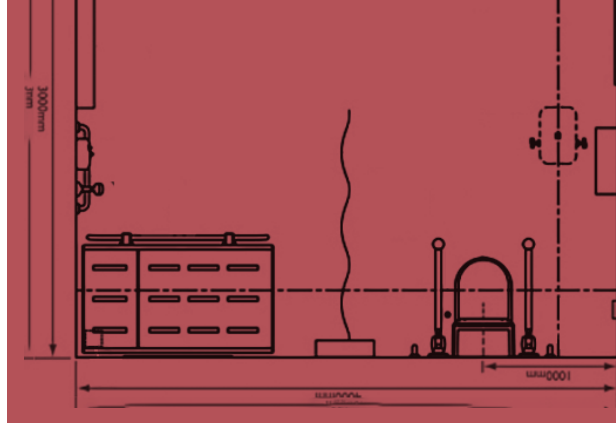
What else do you think could be done to further improve Changing Places?

I think they could be better signposted, both within buildings and also to the wider public. This could include venues highlighting them on their website, promoting them through social media, and clear signposting from the building's entrance. Staff awareness could also be improved. It would make such a difference if all staff at least knew what the Changing Places facility is, where it is situated, and how visitors access it.

Training is also vital. While many visitors will be familiar with the equipment found in a Changing Places facility, this will not always be the case. Therefore, I would advise that several members of staff at the venue receive training once the installation is complete to ensure there is someone either available or contactable to advise should a user require assistance.

People need to be as aware of them as they are of baby changing facilities. The last thing we want is organisations investing the money to include them in their buildings, only for it to sit there unused.

“
People need to be as aware of them as they are of baby changing facilities



Many Changing Places facilities will be installed in existing buildings. What challenges does this represent?

One of the biggest challenges is when the venue is a listed building, as you cannot just start knocking down walls. Sometimes, it is necessary to place the facility in an adjoining building or a portable unit. Unfortunately, on some occasions, it is just not possible to carry out an installation. Space is often an issue with existing buildings, along with finding a suitable location that is accessible for all potential users.

Over 250,000 people in the UK require Changing Places toilets to enable them to get out and about. The Changing Places Consortium is a group of organisations working to support the rights of people living with disabilities: established in 2006, they campaign for Changing Places to be installed in all large public spaces so people can access their community.

One such family is the Baker family from Oxfordshire, who have been using Changing Places for the last 13 years as their son Elliott has kernicterus, a condition which has symptoms similar to athetoid cerebral palsy.

Elliott's mother Caroline explains how they have helped the family: "From a parent's perspective this new legislation is fantastic news, and I wish it had been put in place years ago. Changing Places facilities have certainly changed since Elliott was born, but only really over the last few years and during this time, we have spent many hours changing Elliott in the boot of our car as there either wasn't space or the disabled toilet was just too dirty. Changing Places facilities make a huge difference and definitely influence our choice of location when we are planning a holiday or family days out.

"Shopping centres are generally not great as you often have to share with the baby changing areas, which is not ideal and tend to be busy and dirty, so when you do find a Changing Places facility, it makes such a huge difference. Awareness has increased to a degree but more needs to be done so children, teenagers and adults are no longer having to get changed on toilet floors, which is unacceptable in 2020."

Ropox is one of the UK's leading manufacturers and suppliers of accessible bathrooms and kitchens in both domestic and care environments. They can arrange the design and full installation of Changing Places units across the UK and Ireland. For more information on the full range of products available from Ropox, or to book an assessment, call **07831 401118**, email **pd@ropox.com** or visit **ropox.com**. You can contact Mark on **ms@ropox.com** or **07444 577609**.