public perception of portable potties

// research for my
senior capstone project

compiled by Carly Hagins

In January 2010, I decided to design a portable restroom (aka porta-potty, port-a-john, etc.) for my industrial design senior capstone project. As part of the research, friends and family participated in a short online survey. Some of the most vivid, amusing, and alarming responses are documented here.

* responses are kept in their original form, and therefore may contain spelling errors
** this book contains some explicit language that may not be appropriate for everyone, particularly children

Much thanks to everyone who participated in the survey, to Adam Rumpke, who helped tremendously with this project, to my friends, for putting up with lots of potty talk, and to my parents for all those Sunday dinners.

This book is dedicated to my dad.
I have to think this would have made
him laugh out loud.

Please
define and **describe**
a port-o-potty

Port-o-potty: a portable toilet that **leads to the depth of hell**. It smells, its disgusting, and most times I use the woods instead of the Port-o-potty because i am disgusted.

An outdoor bathroom facility. When you open the door there is an overwhelming smell, then once you enter you are greeted by the visual of the origin of the smell. If you are someone who does not like to sit on public toilet seats you must be in **pretty darn good shape to hold the squat position** required to hover over a bench type toilet seat, not to mention that your forehead will touch the door while squatting. It is an EXTREME bonus if you find one with toilet paper, and much like winning the lottery if you find one with hand sanitizer.

Port o potties vary. I've seen clean ones, but in general, they are smelly and the floor is dirt covered and **I'm afraid to touch any surface** for fear of catching Ebola or hepatitis C. But, they are convenient and totally necessary. Still, I've been known to just pop a squat behind a tree if they are too dirty.

A phone booth sized plastic box from which you eliminate bodily waste into a hole.

Also see "**filthiest things ever**."

It's blue (maybe white trim?)
It's like a **telephone booth for pooping**, but only when you're absolutely desperate, and even then I think I would **rather go in the woods**.

A portable toilet in a tall box. Basically, it's a bucket with a seat over it, and **in the bucket goes the poo**. They always smell horrible because of the **crappy ventilation**. I'm always curious how often they empty those things...

Dirty, smelly and the **last place you want to be**.

A very small compartment with a lid to sit and relieve voneself where the hole you 'crap' in is full of **chemical, feces** and **urine**

an icky stinky **last resort option** when you gotta go but there's nothing else in sight. Honestly, I'd rather find a bush

The **grossest place on earth.** a location of **pure desperation**.

a portable toilet. usually made of hard plastic. terrible smell. open hole. **kids are afraid of falling in.**

a movable, private, single unit in which to **relieve one's bowels.**

A stank nastyass plastic tank with shit and pee pee in it. It **where you go when you gotta go** right then but there isn't a real bathroom.

A **portable rectangle** with a box containing a hole in the top to relieve one's self.

smelly thingn that i hope does not **tip over** while i pee

A **rancid plastic box of nastiness**.
It sucks for the guy who
has to clean up

A port-o-potty is any mobile bathroom facility. They range in size and luxury from the regular blue and pink **OMG the smell is so bad** ones at an airshow or construction site to the one I referred to as the "**Taj Ma-stall**" back stage at a music festival last year.

It is an all out disgusting experience especially if you have to sit down. The smell is pretty bad even with the heavy smell of sanitizing solution. Heat makes it much worse regarding smell and clean feeling pre/post use. **You just feel dirty after using a port-o-potty**. It is a much more private experience than digging a hole however, so in that respect, I love a port-o-potty. That said, **digging a hole feels cleaner**.

gross

A port-o-potty is a mobile restroom which should probably only be **used under dire circumstances** due to its lack of general cleanliness. They are usually green on the outside and have a fakely fresh smell.

a **plastic shittin room** that you can move

it is made of plastic, usually bright blue or green, smells awful so you hold your breath if you must use it, you can't sit on the seat because it's nasty, typically out of toilet paper, usually no hand sanitizer so you hate to unlatch the door to get out, and a lot of times there are **bees or flies inside**!

They are normally gross and you hold your nose if you go in at all. There's the minimum possible space for you to stand without **falling into the thing**, and I have no idea how people can be so messy without cleaning up after themselves. They wouldn't leave their own bathrooms that way!!!

A port-o-potty is an **ingenious invention** that allows you to go to the bathroom wherever you want!

a place to **shit remotely**

glad they are there
when you need them,
but **avoid if possible**

A port-o-potty is a mobile unit that can be placed anywhere to create a temporary bathroom where there isn't a traditional bathroom available. Typically awkward and **easy to make fun of** the port-o-potty itself or the users. Not sure why. Almost always smelly with that scent of deodorizer not quite covering the smell emanating from the waste storage compartment. Poorly lit. Uncomfortable.

a shit house, crapper,
temporary feces storage device.
a place racoons and hillbillys may call
home...in all seriousness its a brightly
colored (or brown) plastic portable
bathroom with a door and a small joke
of a chimney that smells of feces and
disinfectant in which you goto the
bathroom in when you absolutely have
to because there is no other option
around and when you are done you
feel dirty hot and sweaty...that was
serious, did you sense the malice in them...

oh and i should add they can be **tipped
over very easily**...

Are you a
squatter
or a
sitter?

sitter
24.2%
other
20.0%
squatter
55.8%

I sit most of the time, but any time I go into a public bathroom, I have to **wipe off the seat first**. I'm sure it doesn't help very much, but it gives me a little **peace of mind**. I've taken pocket hand sanitizer into a bathroom and sprayed it onto the seat before peeing.

Stand and **Aim**

not sure what squatting is;
i just try **not to touch the seat**

I’m **bisitual**. If there is toilet paper strewn across a seat then I will sit. If it’s suspect then I squat.

i do not use port-o-johns in this way if i can help it...if i had to...id make an assessment based on the **last inspection date** and the **cleanliness of the seat**, and i would still put toilet paper down...i usually only use the urinal setup in them... like i said, **no pooping**...

nester (put lots of toilet paper down around the seat to sit on)

both. it depends on how
lazy i am. if i'm feeling lazy
and it looks clean, i'll sit

I would avoid sitting on a port-o-potty **at all costs**

What are the
worst things
about port-o-potties?

91.7%
the
smell
68.3%
the
germs
75.0%
looking
down
into the
'pit'
65.0%
lack of
supplies
35.0%
the
size
20.0%
how
they
look
28.3%
other

While ‘defecating’, God help you if you have a heavy turd because you have to worry about it **splashing upward.** I find it best to line the lid and roll a small wad of toilet paper into the pit to avoid splash.

cold seat

As the majority of them are quite small and lacking electricity, I've been in many a situation where **waste is (relatively) all over** in the port-o-potty (I'm willing to attribute some of this to the lack of electricity--it is difficult to see). This is one of the worst things.

Also, disfunctional or questionably reliable locks, **uncertainty regarding occupancy**, giving in to the temptation to tip them over when others are inside and facing the **legal ramifications.**

Not being sure where to touch when **supporting the "squat".**

spider webs usually in there! people putting beer bottles, tampons, sanitary napkins in them!!

when it's dark, there is **no lighting in there** so you can't see how gnarly the seat is before you sit on it.

the fact that there is usually someone standing outside **listening to you**!

the way they're so creepy and dim inside. of course, **seeing could be worse**, but at least you'd know if you were coming into contact with foulness.

Everything is always **wet**.

temperature... the oddly colored glow of the plastic and light passing through it...OH and the **odd sound** inside them...

wet floor--a disasyer when wearing sandles. embarasing to be in line with men.
who is next?

The fear of someone **tipping it over**. While you're in it.

They're typically don't have enough light in them, which adds to **claustrophobia**.

They almost always have **flies** which add to the experience. You leave the enclosure with an unclean feeling and only use these facilities out of **need**.

In terms of smell, it doesn’t only smell like poop and pee but also of a **thickened perfume**.

Where
have you used a
port-o-potty?

construction site (13.4%)
private residence (6.7%)
summer camp (29.4%)
i've never used one (0.8%)
other (42.9%)
concert (29.7%)
sporting event (74.8%)

Only once at the
Cleveland Air Show because I
couldn't hold "it" any longer
and we weren't leaving
anytime soon!

found one in the **middle**
of nowhere and i had to go

Once when I was on a long run, there **weren't any other options...**

I’ve been in one before
but I **can’t remember when**
nor for what reason.

What do you do if you **do not have access** to a **hand washing station** after using the bathroom?

13.3%
nothing; its no big deal
71.7%
use personal hand sanitizer
30.8%
seek out a public bathroom or sink
16.7%
avoid personal contact with other people
55.0%
feel gross and germy
12.5%
other

I could wipe my hands on grass
and **feel a little cleaner**. T_T

go the “natural route” and wipe
my hands on leaves and such.
nature’s way.

wipe my hands **vigorously on my jeans**. Find a water bottle first if possible.

baby wipes from the car.

avoid contact with **my own orifices**.

Be more careful **WHILE USING**
the bathroom

handle food carefully,
which always seems to
coincide with port-o-potty use.

By practice, I am a
hand washing fanatic
post-potty time--when available.
A person is already exposed to
an untold number germs a result of
being at a public event/ situation
that would require the use a POP.
I would use hand sanitizer if
available but it is not of any real
value to stop the spread of germs.
The plastic door, walls, dispensers
are **collection point contaminants**
by any one using the facility.

What is your
worst experience
with a public restroom
or port-o-potty?

When I was three or four
I tried to **poop in a urinal**.

At a campsite, the outhouse we had to use all week was made of wood and was rotting, so the back had a big hole in it, and there were rumors that a **raccoon would come** and attack you while on the pot. Also, the lock didn't work, so you had to worry about people barging in or the wind blowing the door open, and mosquitoes would come in through the pit and **eat your butt**.

Haha - as I've already mentioned : when i was a child i went into one that was **harboring a wasp nest**. That is the scariest thing you could encounter while squatting over a stinky toilet. I have a fear of bees/ wasps and am now apprehensive everytime i even consider using one.

Any time you take a child into one of those **dens of bacterial splendor** you wish you could tie their arms behind their backs and hold them over the seat while they pee. In reality, they **touch every available surface** and then **rub their faces**. Yuck.

Grateful Dead Blossom 1986. Overflowing bathrooms everywhere.

Someone wanted to **join me** to avoid waiting in line. (I refused.)

a crazy person came in and started yelling for about 20 minutes, during which time i **refused to leave the stall** in an effort to stay safe

i did not experience this, but a friend **dropped her cell phone into the port-o-potty**!

angry raccoon in there

Dont have a specific one, but **poo splatter** is always a winner in my book. I also hate spiders and there are always bugs in those damn things.

The port-o-potty was **so full of huge turds** that I turned around and held it. I might have been 12 at the time; I was afraid that I would get spatter up from countless other people's bowel movements.

everyone **waiting** for you to be done

someone **locked me in**! gross

i had to **take off my sock and use it to wipe myself** since there wasn’t any toilet paper and i hadn’t checked before i used.

in the dark the black lids can be unseen. When drunk **it sucks peeing on the lid**... enough said. In addition the step down can be a doozey. I have been in a portopotty that had no step down, it had max space, and wonderful air vents.

i have used public toilets in india
and nepal whose filth cannot be
accurately described.
people are at their most depraved
in the privacy of a portopotty.
also - there is that story of the perv
who liked to hide in the pit and get
pooped on. that terrifies me
on many many levels.

I once **saw a cake** down in the "pit", it was a bit disturbing.

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getting my dress all wet in one. didn't realize the area around the seat was wet and my dress fell in it as i squatted — gross!

A guy didn't latch the door and I **walked in on him doing his business**.

I've never had a standout negative experience, but port-o-potties are unpleasant, and a public bathroom that is not clean is also unpleasant. **Don't get me started on a not-clean port-o-potty**.

My worst experience was in a public bathroom at a temple/ tourist-ish spot in China. They have **squat-pots** there and this place had had so much traffic and the facilities were so run down that half the toilets didn't work.. The bathroom stench could be smelled from 20 feet away from the entrance. Having to hold my breath to keep from gagging and squat so that none of my clothes touched the floor was **so aggravating I don't even know if I could make myself pee at that point**.

My worst experience with a public bathroom was at a wedding this fall. The reception was on a farm and the only restrooms were 2 port-o-potties. the worst part was that **there was no mirror in the bathroom to fix my hair**.

Have you ever
‘held it’
in order to avoid
using a port-o-potty?

Who hasn’t?

story of my life

yep. i'm a camel. will do what
i have to do. also, sometimes
this stops me from drinking beer (sad)
just to avoid using a portopotty.

I'd rather get a bladder infection
than bear the unpleasant
porta potty experience.
costs over benefits.

Yes, and **I got terrible cramping** that lasted for hours, even after I found a place to relieve myself.

Held it? I have gone in the woods to avoid using a port-o-potty. I've learned to squat very well! I've **taught my kids to squat, too**!

always..... haven't used one since I was a child!

yes I will wiggle my way to the nearest rest stop before using one if I can I **avoid it like the plague**

I **avoid drinking anything**, if I know where we are going only has a port-o-potty... that way I won't have to use it!

just because at the end of the night they rank so bad i have to hold my breath and bare it. Some times it is **too much to bare.**

Of course. Like I said above, I avoid it at all costs unless its an **emergency** and I can't find any wooded area around

never go number two in a port-o-potty at any cost.

As often as I can. Once a year I go to a festival in Indiana and I try to make it the whole day and **only go once**. Usually I have to stop at a resteranunt when we leave, leave early or be **really uncomfortable** on the way home

If it was an option, I would **always** 'hold it' before using a port-o-potty

OHH YES. yes. If you see the porta potty, thats like a beacon of “dont even think about drinking beverages tonight!” its like a **lighthouse of doom.**

I’d have to be really desperate **not** to hold it!

I tried to, but **the runs just had to run their course** after my queso and chips at my cousins wedding

If you could
design your own
port-o-potty,
what would it be like?

Hand Sanatizer, Clorox wipes for
the seat, paper seat covers,
a floor with holes in it and
NO URINAL FOR MEN
on the side. The **after bubbles**
are gross and never go away.

My perfect port-o-potty would include only a urinal (as **I never go number 2 anyways**) with a plasma tv above it that played **Lady Gaga** videos, therefore distracting me from the unpleasant experience of peeing in a plastic hut.

It would smell **completely neutral**... not chemical/fake “fresh” and not like waste. It would be less dark and less hot (my experiences have mostly been in the summer I guess). I would not be subjected to seeing other people’s waste. Thinking about port-o-potties is **really grossing me out**.

Much bigger, with a much bigger ventilation window to allow for **more air** and **less odor**. It would have more storage for holding toilet paper and a very high hook to hang a purse or diaperbag because you cannot set it on the floor...nasty. I used a handicapped port o let before and it was roomier and less stank and allowed room for my kid to stand in there with me so she did not have to wait outside without me.

It would have a bit more legroom and shoulder room with amazing ventilation, making it easy to move around without rubbing surfaces and **baking on that stink**. A built-in hand sanitizer would be wonderful also, so I don't have to feel like I am **spreading the plague** by simply going to the restroom. They are also inherently dark, so I would propose a skylight or glow in the dark paneling to navigate better.

i dont want to see the **blue sea of poop** and i dont want to have to touch anything (doors) and i want hand sanitizer. i dont know how in depth youre getting but maybe check out the whole process of the portopotty; design, construction, delivery to the company, delivery to the site, cleaning, and pickup. check johnnyonthespot.com they have mobile bathrooms aka multiperson bathroom on wheels and “luxury” portopottys

About the size of an **office cubicle** - so one can turn around without falling out or touching anything with more ventilation for hot sunny days that make smells worse. Automatic air fresheners and handwashing station of some sort.

More room to turn around inside of it.

compost toilet -- john was telling me about this and it doesn't smell. It would need to be well-lit and have hooks for hanging purse etc. No cheapy plastic walls - or at least nicely colors and nice graphics that would be inviting. Needs to have "occupied" or "vacant" Hand sanitizer is better than running water and napkins - which just get all over the floor and no one picks them up. Add a mirror ?

More like an indoor bathroom.. Maybe a little more spacious. Not able to see into the pit may help with the smell, look, and feel. More like an **airline bathroom**?

much bigger with
constant airflow, a sink,
aromotherapy candles and scents,
a radio with **soothing music**
and instant cleaner after
each person goes.

I think porto potties are pretty icky, but I wouldn't want to pollute the earth with chemicals to make the smell better.**They stink**, thats for sure, but **if I gotta go it's gonna happen**. Maybe better ventilation? The one's at summer festivals are really hot during the day. Some kind of soap situation would be a nice improvement to reduce the spread of germs. If there was a way to **use the waste as compost** that would be cool. Sustainable materials?

It would make me feel good to know that my poop were being used as fertilizer or something. **Put the urine and feces to work**! Recycle.

First of all, it would be a **fairly sterile** and sparkling clean environment. Then it would come in **fun colors**. and there would be no bottomless pit to be afraid of. It would smell **lovely**.

It would be made of antimicrobial materials and the top would be able to open for air, which should be its default state unless it's raining. Also, the **giant hole wouldn't be staring right at you**, but would close up after flushing, like the toilet on an airplane.

I would not design one.
They are **too disgusting.**

no smell , seperate chambers
under hole to elimate seeing stuff,
a open top for ventilation but light
cover to avoid weather conditions,
maybe a different shape for an
optical illusion of more space and
a hand vapor cleaner big enough
to last for a thousand sprays

more like an **airplane toilet** (flushes away). more space for toilet paper so it stops running out so quickly. hand sanitizer on the outside of the potty so that you can sanitize your hands AFTER touching the nasty knob to open the door and so someone else can use it more quickly. and the sanitizer would be bigger than the ones they normally have so that it doesn't run out as fast.

One for girls. One for boys.
Self draining floor.
Infinite amount of TP.
Always available hand sanitizer.
Foot operated lock--
I try not to touch anything.

There needs to be a **barrier** between you and the SHIT. Maybe a **scented biodegradable bag** that you poop in and it drops into the container so it's all **contained** and **not stinky**. It would be nice if they weren't so dark and humid as well. More ventilation and a way to let light in without letting people see you. A way to put like 15 rolls of toilet paper in it so they drop down and it's very unlikely you'd run out. Right now there's a bunch of room on either side of you but none in front of you. Shelf for purses, or at least a hook!

...ok that's a lot of things and if I don't stop I'll be here for an hour thinking of all the bad things about port-o-pottys. You can come to me later for more :)

It would have an endless supply of toilet paper, hand sanitizer, odor eliminators, and some sort of "door" to **avoid looking into the bottom of it**.

wow now **that is a question**. They really arent that bad maybe not able to see down tank wold be an improvement.

I don't know. Possibly without the **big spring** that makes the door slam shut. More ventilation.

sound proof and bigger!!

pimped out wit gold bling and make it big enough that you can do yo business wit out being botherd

the pit would be exposed only after i've **squatted** over the seat.

Something that masks the smell and stops me from having to stare down at everyone's business. I'd put a **permanently circulating ventilation** system in it. I'd Also put a slight funnel and curve into the toilet part so the waste is diverted from view.

a **replica of my home potty** - to scale

First of all, it would be a little larger. I guess there is really no way to make a flushable port-o-potty but if there were, I would. I would also install hand sanitizer stations in there that are automatic so you wouldn't have to touch anything. Also, the port-o-potties I have been in have almost been "**bench like**" and **hard to squat on top of**. I would make it shaped more like a regular toilet so it would be easier to squat.

it would be clean!
and have nice ventilation..
and there **wouldn't be shit all over the floor**.

I appreciate the **door handle** - I use this to hold onto when squatting. **More handles** would be great. Mens and women's would be great too.

no step down, open space, massive ventalation (maybe even in the poop area... **give your but some ventallation**), endless supply of toilet paper, some kind of sanitation... maybe like a spray. I would check out japanese toilets/ public restrooms. I heard they are **hella awesome** and **hella sterile**. Just a thought. OOOOWWW!!! And a **light for dark times**... I would make it a solar light. FANS in the solar energy feed too :)

I am in **heaven** when the event splurges for **built in hand sanitizers**. I would love to **NEVER see anyone else's poo ever again**. I would also like **glow in the dark** features for nightime uses. Better communicating occupied/vacant latches, because nobody wants to walk in on someone but sometimes the latches look 'occupied' when they aren't.

Some automation to avoid the **dreaded contact** with germy surfaces would be in order. Perhaps a bit more room to maneuver. Needs hooks for keeping stuff off the ground. Needs “neverending” supplies, including hand sanitizer. Definitely **avoid the downward view**, if possible. Some **humour** might help to make light of the situation of being in a port-o-potty - funny signs, characters, etc.

There would be a much more **efficient** use of space, possibly a perforated floor to keep all the grime form outside and pee from **inaccurate people** off of my shoes, a bit taller to suit more people, and a much easier to use interior (simpler, with more TP, soap, etc)