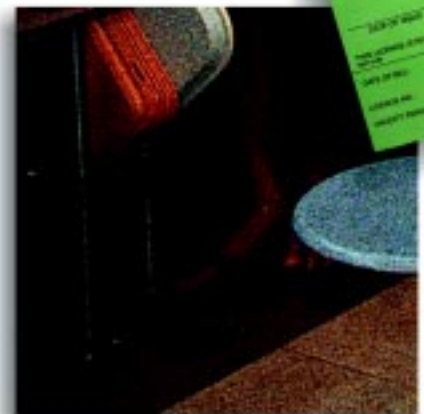


Hawker Management



Singaporeans continue to enjoy the charm of eating at hawker centres – thanks to ENV's continuing drive to ensure hawker food is safe and hawker centres are clean.



History

A familiar sight in the 50s and 60s were the myriad hawker stalls that filled Singapore's streets and alleys. While there's little argument that these hawkers brought a certain charm to the social and cultural landscape, many stallholders plied their trade under less than desirable conditions. More often than not, hawkers operated under unhygienic conditions, contending with a lack of a piped water supply and inadequate facilities to prepare and cook their food. To compound the matter, the authorities and wider population had to deal with the indiscriminate disposal of wastes into drains. In time this caused considerable pollution in the island's drains and watercourses, endangering both public health and the environment.

This prompted the government to develop the plan to build designated areas for hawkers. These areas - which we now know as hawker centres - would have a complete infrastructure to support hawkers' day to day operations. An island-wide census in 1968/69 was the first step in systematic phasing out of hawkers. The census registered a total of 18,000 street hawkers who were then issued with temporary hawking licences. The exercise effectively curbed illegal hawking in Singapore.

In 1970, the government began to re-site street hawkers. These hawker centres were equipped with proper facilities for food preparation and cooking, and supported by clean and efficient drainage systems as well as proper sanitation facilities. By February 1986, all street hawkers were completely re-sited in hawker centres.

Fifteen years on, there are now 139 hawker centres owned by ENV, the Housing & Development Board (HDB) and the Jurong Town Corporation (JTC). Collectively, these hawker centres hold a total of 17,331

occupied stalls; 10,333 being market stalls and 6,998 being cooked food stalls.

Stall allocation policy

Following the relocation of hawkers to hawker centres, a number of vacant stalls were allocated to hardship cases (i.e. hawkers who were unemployed and/or experiencing financial difficulty). The hardship scheme was discontinued in April 1998. Vacant stalls are now periodically tendered out for rental to the public.

Management of hawkers

All stallholders in hawker centres are licensed by ENV. Stallholders are required by law to ensure that food prepared in their stalls are safe for public consumption. Stallholders are expected to be vigilant in adhering to proper food and personal hygiene practices and to ensure that their stalls are free from pest and vector infestation.

As a further precaution, all licencees and their assistants are vaccinated against typhoid and those above 45 years are screened for tuberculosis. The food handlers must also attend and pass a food hygiene course.

With a view to obtain exemplary hygiene standards in hawker centres, ENV introduced a points demerit system. During the year, 231 hawkers were given demerit points for flouting hygiene standards. From this, 16 had their licences suspended for two weeks.

In 2000, ENV held 489 dialogue sessions with hawkers' representatives to discuss and resolve problems pertaining to their centres.

Hawker centre upgrading works

All ENV market and food centres undergo cyclical repairs and redecoration works. ENV undertakes the upgrading work, either a three-year



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or a five-year one to ensure that stallholders are equipped with proper facilities that are operational and efficient. In 2000, upgrading works was carried out at Holland Road Market and Market Street Food Centre.

In 1998, ENV has also embarked on a program to refurbish the toilets in all ENV markets and food centres. Under this program, ENV will install quality toilet fixtures, modern accessories, and automatic sensor flush valves in public toilets. Along with re-tiling of walls and floors, the entrances to the toilets will also be installed with coin-operated turnstiles. Mechanical ventilation will be provided for the toilet cubicles.

1999 saw the first three refurbished toilets - in North Bridge Road Market, Market Street Food Centre and Sembawang Hill Food Centre. In 2000, the toilet refurbishment program was implemented in Newton Food Centre, Golden Mile Food Centre, Berseh Food Centre, Bukit Timah Market, Balestier Rd Market and Pasir Panjang Food Centre.

Repair & refurbishment works for toilets at Newton Food Centre have been completed, while the works in the other five Centres are works-in-progress, expected to see completion by April 2001.



Newly repaired and refurbished toilet at Newton Food Centre.

Beo Crescent Market & Maxwell Food Centre

Two hawker centres - Beo Crescent Market and Maxwell Food Centre - also underwent an overhaul in 2000.

The major upgrading work at Beo Crescent Market was completed in about 5 months and the market re-opened for business in December 2000. ENV spent some \$1.9M on the upgrading project. Upgrading project at Maxwell Food Centre was tendered out at a cost of \$2.32M. The works commenced in September 2000 and the hawkers are expected to move in by March 2001.

Stall ownership scheme

Launched by ENV in April 1994, the Stall Ownership Scheme enable stallholders to own their stalls. Under the scheme, stalls in ENV and HDB hawker centres are sold to incumbent stallholders on a 20-year lease at a discount. Those who declined to buy their stalls could surrender them and opt for cash grants or continue to rent their stalls at a revised rate instead.

To date, 4 batches of stalls in 15 hawker centres had been sold, with 1,871 stallholders or 90.2% opting to buy their stalls. 9.2% of the stallholders accepted cash grants. These stallholders were mostly elderly hawkers who had planned to retire.

Stallholders who bought their stalls were given permission to sublet them. As a result, many of these stalls were opened for longer operation hours. These stallholders were also allowed to sell their stalls. Some did and, consequently, more innovative and enterprising players joined the trade.

Due to the economic downturn affecting the region, no stalls were offered for sale in 1999 and 2000.



Newly upgraded Beo Crescent market.

Stall assignment scheme

ENV launched the Stall Assignment Scheme in February 1998, to allow stallholders to assign their stalls to operators who are willing to pay rent as assessed by the Chief Valuer. The assignees will operate the stalls free of restrictions applied to subsidised stalls. They can sublet the stall or get someone to run the stall on their behalf.

As an extension to the Stall Assignment Scheme, a stallholder currently paying subsidised rent may opt to “assign” the stall to her/himself. This effectively means that s/he can opt to pay rental rates as assessed by the Chief Valuer and can operate the stall free of the restrictions imposed on subsidised stalls.

The assignees will be granted a three-year tenancy agreement with the option for renewal if the hawker centre is not affected by redevelopment. If the stalls in the hawker centre are offered for sale under the Stall Ownership Scheme, the assignees may also buy the stalls at the assessed values without tendering for them.

The Stall Assignment Scheme was proven to be extremely popular with hawkers and as at December 2000, a total of 1269 stalls in ENV, HDB and JTC hawker centres had been assigned.

Cold chain system

The Cold Chain System was implemented to

ensure meat safety, freshness and nutritional values for customers. The system requires meat to be kept chilled throughout the entire preparation process, from slaughter to product retail.

Introduced in 1999, the Cold Chain system was implemented in 3 phases. Phase 1, required pork stallholders to install display chillers by 1 Nov 1999. Phase 2, which was initiated in May 2000, targeted all poultry stallholders. Beef and mutton stalls, addressed in Phase 3, were given till 1 Nov 2000 to comply with the requirements.

Chilling requirements were also introduced to cooked food stalls serving raw fish as chilling will inhibit the growth of the micro-organisms present on the raw fish. The system was extended to this trade to ensure public health safety as the food is sold and served raw. This group of stallholders was incorporated within the 3rd phase of the system.

All the three phases of the Cold Chain System smoothly implemented with a full compliance rate.

24-hour operation public service

As of 15 Mar 2000, ENV started the 24-hour operation service to attend to complaints from the members of the public. Under the present configuration, there are 12 enforcement officers on duty in the morning and afternoon shifts, until 10pm daily. Another four officers take over their duties in the midnight shift until 7am the next morning.

Enforcement officers attend to illegal hawking complaints as well as environmental health complaints such as noise pollution, illegal dumping, smoking in prohibited areas etc. that are received through the ENV Hotline, after office hours.