

# Drinking Up the Hysteria

## By Joseph P. Guzzo

We all have some sort of phobia or superstitions. They range from the minor to the mundane. One of my favorites is you must wait ½ hour after you eat before you can go swimming or you will drown. Most know by now that superstition is, for lack of a better word, false. However many refuse to let go of their personal phobias no matter what the true facts are.

Recently I attended a Plumbing Board meeting. I usually come out of these meetings with lots of material, or a very large headache, it depends how much I can take. On this day I was there to explain the reason I had sent a large drug store chain for a variance. The variance was for the drug store that was opening a minute clinic within the store not to be required to install a shower. That's right a shower.

Most of these stores, and there is at least one in every Town, as they exist are retail sales. They would only be required to supply toilet facilities for their employees. However in a recent venture many stores would be applying for permits to operate a health clinic within the store. Under our regulations that would be considered a change of use. The store must now comply with 248c.m.r. section 10.10,18,k and table #1, Health Care. Toilet facilities must now be supplied for the customers. Quote: *In all medical and health care buildings there shall be separate designated toilet facilities on each floor for male and female patients and visitors. Also, handicapped toilet facilities are required on each floor, and a minimum of one drinking fountain shall be installed for each set of toilet rooms.*

You must also refer to table #1, which will dictate the proper ratio of fixtures, as well as what fixtures are required for that particular use. On table #1 you will clearly see one bath or shower is required for each set of toilet rooms. This means every health care facility including, a dentist office, chiropractor, psychiatrist, etc, etc, would be required to install a shower. This requirement did not appear on table one prior to the last round of code revisions. Which concludes this was a mistake, along with the elimination of drinking fountains, and service sinks for many uses. Proper procedure requires a variance until this can be corrected.

The Chairman acknowledged the problem, as many of these stores across the State will be installing these clinics. He explained that the Board has been working on a matrix, can't wait to see that, as to what procedure to follow as a guide for Plumbing Inspectors. He said this may eliminate the need for a variance for the shower. Then he said the Board was considering allowing a bottled water dispenser instead of drinking fountains. I said whoa, whoa, what did you just say? That's when my headache started.

First and foremost, the Plumbing Board has absolutely no authority what so ever to require the use or installation of a bottled water dispenser, no more than requiring a coke machine. A bottled water dispenser is not a plumbing fixture. Neither the water nor the dispenser is regulated. They are not handicapped accessible, and what happens when you run out of water? Or, what if the store simply wanted to cancel the contract. Maybe the Board is going to register, track, and make sure all bottled water dispensers stay full. Good luck with that.

Now a drinking fountain is a legitimate product approved plumbing fixture. They are installed by professional plumbers. Connected to an endless supply of potable highly regulated water, they are safe, clean, and handicapped accessible. In fact drinking fountains were invented over 100 years ago to promote a safe and sanitary way to drink water and are considered one of the most important inventions of the century. Yet even though there is a world-wide trend to ban bottled water, in fact many cities and towns have already cancelled all bottled water contracts, and banned bottled water from all municipal buildings, this Plumbing Board would rather act on one member's phobia about drinking fountains.

Yes that's right, it is my understanding that one member of the Board has a phobia about drinking fountains and considers them unsanitary. I have even heard the ridiculous reason that someone could throw up in a drinking fountain. I suppose it could be possible, but I have never heard of any type of medical condition that when you see a drinking fountain it induces the urge to vomit. You could also throw up in a lavatory, same place you wash your hands and face. Then we should also replace lavatories with canisters of hand sanitizer. For that matter you could throw up on a bottled water dispenser. Now what do we do?

If drinking fountains are unsafe, why then does the Plumbing Board continue to approve them? And if there are claims that drinking fountains are unsanitary, then back it up. The fact is it is simply unsubstantiated hysteria. I learned long ago what the true intent of our code was concerning the requirement of drinking fountains, especially in a health care facility. It only takes a very little common sense, apparently something this Board is lacking. To the member with the phobia, be careful Mr. Monk, it's a jungle out there.