

Fairway man's invention rids latrines of smell

By CHAD DAY/The Kansas City Star

Photo by: JILL TOYOSHIBA/The Kansas City Star



The U.S. Forest Service is taking a look — and a smell — at the Mountain Air Processor invented by Don Sifers.

Don Sifers never forgot his first trip to a latrine at Boy Scout camp when he was 12.

“I had never been around anything that smelled like that,” the Fairway man remembers.

Someone should do something about this, he thought. And now, more than 50 years later, he has.

Sifers has installed his Mountain Air Processors at some locations, and he hopes that Thursday was a step toward selling a lot more of them to fix a problem every camper knows well but probably doesn't talk about much.

A U.S. Forest Service official arrived to take a look — and a smell — and decide whether to recommend using the invention at its campsites.

Brenda Land, a sanitary engineer at the Forest Service, traveled from San Dimas, Calif., to see Sifers' processor deodorize a smelly latrine at the Boy Scouts of America's Camp Geiger near St. Joseph.

Land's reaction: “If you have a big enough problem, this unit can deal with it.”

She said she is prepared to recommend it for campgrounds that want to solve their odor problem.

Sifers is wary about describing exactly how his system works to pull the fecal and urine odors out of vault latrines and release them odor-free. After all, the patent is still pending on the propane-powered unit, a metal box that's elevated, drawing air from the latrine and deodorizing it.

But he said: “No one's ever been able to do what we do.”

Of course, other ways to keep the smell away are to completely clean out the latrines or install flush toilets.

But the Forest Service doesn't have the money to replace all of its latrines with flush toilets, nor does it want to, Land said. Campers come to their campsites expecting to get away from things like that.

"We tend to be more on the rustic side to begin with," she said.

Camp Geiger installed one of Sifers' systems a year ago.

John Clawson, the ranger at Camp Geiger, said there's always a mention of the odor of vault latrines on their campsite evaluations, especially among less seasoned campers.

"It's more common that the younger kids and the younger parents mention it," he said.

But with Sifers' processor, he hasn't had anyone notice the smell.

"From what I've experienced, you don't even smell it unless you are right up next to it," he said.

He said the camp is considering installing more units, which cost about \$4,000 for installation and an initial service agreement. He's particularly interested in the unit's ability to heat latrines in the winter.

"When kids camp out here at 10 degrees, 20 degrees, it would serve a dual purpose," he said.

Others testify about the Mountain Air Processor, even if they haven't bought one.

About two years ago, Sifers went to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers site at Perry Lake in Kansas to test out the processor on one of its latrines.

And while the corps doesn't endorse products, Kenneth Wade, operations project manager at Perry Lake, said he remembers the smell going away almost immediately.

"It did do what he said it would do," Wade said.

The Perry Lake facility doesn't use the processors because it's cheaper to combat the smell by keeping the vaults cleaned out, and Wade said his staff is looking to install flush toilets that cost about \$50,000 per restroom.

Sifers is hoping to market the processors to operations that can't spend that much for an odor problem. They are also starting to develop ways to install the unit to deodorize large animal operations known for their smell, such as hog farms.

Sifers said that he doesn't know when he'll hear back on the patent, but he's used to the pace of inventing.

After he became President of Sifers Chemicals, he developed an aerosol carpet stain remover in 1964 which he named "Spot Shot" which was later sold to WD-40.