

The Martialist Issue Eight Subscriber Content

Public Bathroom Safety

By Phil Elmore

As much as we might snicker at the idea of the “tactical restroom mindset,” the need for personal security precautions in lavatories is very real. You are quite vulnerable and usually deliberately unaware in the restroom. Predators know this and will take advantage of the “terrain” to prey on you at your weakest.

HOLD IT

There are some public restrooms that are so filthy, so disgusting, that you’ll do just about anything to avoid using them. You’ll “hold it,” you’ll go behind a building or a dumpster, you’ll find someplace else... The same should be true for any restroom you know to be risky to your personal security.

If you know that the public restroom closest to you is frequented by druggies or dealers buying or selling, gang thugs posturing or having fights, or whores and johns having sex, plan on going somewhere else. No, you won’t always know, and no, you won’t always be able to avoid bad restrooms. You can cut the odds against you by avoiding such places when possible, though.

CHECK IT OUT

When you can, discreetly scout any public restroom you enter. If there are a lot of people loitering but not doing their business, turn and leave. Don’t make a big thing about it, don’t say anything, and don’t change expression – just leave the way you came in. By and large, people just don’t loiter in bathrooms longer than necessary. Loiterers are, therefore, more likely to be predators waiting for prey.

If possible, duck your head and scout for feet under closed stall doors. Always know how many people are in the restroom with you and keep an ear out for footsteps and swinging doors. A sudden increase in occupancy or a mass exodus is cause for alarm. Yes, coincidences happen, but stay alert nonetheless.

When you’re washing your hands, look up, not at your palms. Use the mirror above the sink to monitor activity behind you. Mirrors are a great way to check out what’s going on about you, no matter where you find them. Use them to your advantage.

<http://www.randomterrain.com/futuristic/bathrooms.html>

USE A STALL

Women, of course, don’t have a choice in the matter, but you should not use urinals unless you have no choice. While standing at a urinal, your own modesty and societal convention demand that you stare straight ahead. You’re staring into a wall, corralled in a specific position and orientation. What could be more accommodating to an assailant?

If you *are* using a urinal and someone comes up behind you with ill intent, turn and spray. This is no time to be shy. Give your attacker something to think about as you whip around to face him. (Yes, I wrote that on purpose.)

Whenever possible, though, you’re better off within the protective walls of a

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stall. The walls block your vision, though, which increases your need to listen and remain alert. No bathroom stall is Fort Knox, but the walls protect you from direct attack up to a point. They also shield you from the prying eyes of predators who might otherwise have ample opportunity to size you up.

DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE

If you're seated in a stall doing your business, you're vulnerable. Some things can't be rushed, but don't linger more than necessary. Don't bring reading materials and don't waste time.

You are vulnerable, specifically, to someone reaching over, reaching under, or pushing in the door of your stall. Reaching over isn't a big threat, unless you fear the depredation of a passing basketball team, since most people aren't tall enough to reach over the stall comfortably. The latch on most stalls will prevent mildly aggressive entry attempts (though it will be ineffective against a determined stall-breaker's efforts). No, the biggest threat is from people reaching under your stall walls or door to grab your pants (and thus your wallet) or to grab or cut your legs.

If you carry a tactical folder clipped to your pocket or waistband, remove it and clip it to your shirt pocket or collar when seated in the stall. Keep watch for activity on either side or in front of you and be prepared for intruding limbs at floor level.

GO SAFELY

Most of the time, the precautions described are not all necessary. Most of us see the restroom as a place of

relative safety. When in public, however, you can take nothing for granted. Keep your wits about you, do your business, and move on quietly and quickly.

If you can't go before you leave the house, you can at least go safely. ♠

One account I've read online from a trustworthy individual went something like this:

Our hero was sitting on the throne in a public restroom. He carried a knife, which was clipped to the pocket of his pants, but of course the pants were down around his ankles.

One of society's predators chose that moment to reach under the stall wall in order to grab his knife, though it's possible he was going for the pants and for the wallet one presumes was contained within them.

Our hero, on seeing the threat, either drew the knife from his pants or drew a second knife – I am unclear as to which, as it's been a while – and slashed the arm of the invader.

We don't like to think that sitting in a bathroom stall is one place where anyone would bother us, but some people aren't bothered by the things that give ordinary citizens pause.

If you keep tactical knives clipped to your pockets or inside your waistband, this is a sobering account. Be aware of where your pants and your accessories are at all times.

- Editor