

Hands up for toilet breaks at work

Employers should not be able to penalise staff for using the toilet in work time and should provide decent, clean lavatories, the TUC has said. The union body is calling for a change in the law to bring workplace loos into the 21st century. Back in 2003 when the TUC first launched its Gotta Go campaign, research revealed that across the UK many workers had no access to toilets or had to use dirty, poorly maintained ones. Others were docked pay for needing to use the loo, and had to ask if they could be excused to spend a penny. TUC says six years on it seems the situation has barely changed. A new TUC report, 'Give us a (loo) break', cites examples of staff having to put their hands up to use the toilet, record the number of times they nip to the loo each day or travel a mile to pee. The TUC report is critical of employers who still believe that employees should go to the loo in their own time. Others plan work schedules that take no account of toilet breaks or where toilet use is frowned upon. And the report points to the case of a female firefighter who had to change her tampons in the back of a fire engine while her male colleagues stood guard outside. As a result of union pressure, a number of brigades have now introduced mobile welfare vehicles which have separate women and men's toilets. Other staff are based in workplaces where the toilets are closed at night, or have given up their own time and come in at the weekend to replenish the soap and paper towels in their poorly stocked loos. TUC deputy general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "Employees should be free to go to the toilet in work time, and not have to raise their hands for permission as if they were back in school, or have their employers keep notes on how long or how often they go for. And when staff do get the loo, they have the right to expect clean, well-ventilated facilities."

- [TUC news release](#). [The Independent](#).