

Survey Reveals Office Worker Handwashing Behaviors

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According to a recent survey of American office workers by SCA, a hygiene products company, 68 percent of office workers say they have seen their co-workers not wash their hands after using the restroom. And of those that say they do wash their hands about one in five say they simply give their hands a quick rinse, regardless of what was done in the bathroom.

"We know that in some offices being willing to 'get your hands dirty' is a sign of a strong work ethic," says Amy Bellcourt, vice president of SCA, "but we don't think this is what anyone had in mind." SCA, which manufactures the hand towels and soap found in many office and public restrooms, conducted the survey to commemorate [Global Handwashing Day](#).

Of course office bathrooms may not be creating the optimal environment for robust handwashing. Many office bathrooms still feature air hand dryers and according to the survey 32 percent report that they don't use them at all. Either those are a lot of wet hands or they represent the dirtiest of the dirty-handed office workers. Nearly three-quarters (68 percent) of respondents do use air dryers, but a full 42 percent of those surveyed said they would prefer to have paper towels available in the office restroom. Even though office workers report seeing their co-workers not wash their hands, 38 percent say they have not confronted a co-worker simply because they didn't know how to bring it up. At the same time, about one-third of office workers who have seen co-workers not wash their hands have confronted them because they say "it's disgusting," according to the survey. "Office workers come in contact with a lot of surfaces during the day and even though hands may not appear dirty, the potential to spread germs is high," says Bellcourt. "Following good handwashing practices, like washing and completely drying your hands after using the restroom, can help office workers avoid catching anything from the common cold to dangerous viruses." On a regional level, the SCA survey found that office workers who live in the Midwest are more likely than those living in the South to have noticed a co-worker not washing their hands (74 percent vs. 64 percent). Interestingly, younger employees seem more likely than boomers to have good bathroom hygiene habits or at least they are more likely to notice bad behavior. In fact, of office workers who say they wash their hands regularly when using the bathroom, 76 percent of those under the age of 45 report seeing colleagues who did not wash their hands. Only 60 percent of office workers over 45 say they have noticed such behavior in the bathroom. Not surprisingly, the majority of poor bathroom hygiene habits seem to take place in the men's room. According to the survey 75 percent of male office workers say they have witnessed a colleague not wash their hands, while only 61 percent of female office workers report seeing such a thing in the ladies room. Office workers who admitted to not washing their hands cite a variety of reasons for committing the dirty deed, including: my hands aren't really dirty (69 percent); I don't have time (8 percent); there was no soap or towels (4 percent); and the disturbing, nobody was watching (3 percent).), which falls on Oct. 15 this year. The survey was conducted for SCA by KRC Research and involved 500 full or part-time office workers, ages 18 and older. The survey was conducted via telephone from Sept. 30, 2011 to Oct. 2, 2011.