

# Water-Saving Chemical Toilet Illegal

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Long after rain returns to the parched hills and valleys of Northern and Central California, tales of the two-year drought will survive to be told and re-told.

Like the saga of the genial gasoline station owner who, in an effort to save water, closed the rest rooms at his station. He didn't want to inconvenience his customers, however, so he set up chemical toilets behind the station. But then, because state and municipal laws forbid chemical toilets at service stations, he disassembled the portable bathrooms.

What thanks did he get for his troubles? An odoriferous back lot which the public had used for an open-air toilet.

Like most folk tales, that story is a bit oversimplified, but it indicates a problem

that the Santa Cruz City government is going to try to solve.

One service station owner who has spoken publicly

about his troubles is Virgil Smith, who owns the Exxon gasoline station on Ocean Street. His first water bill after rationing went into ef-

fect included a \$500 penalty for using too much water.

Smith said he closed the rest rooms at the station to cut back his water use. But

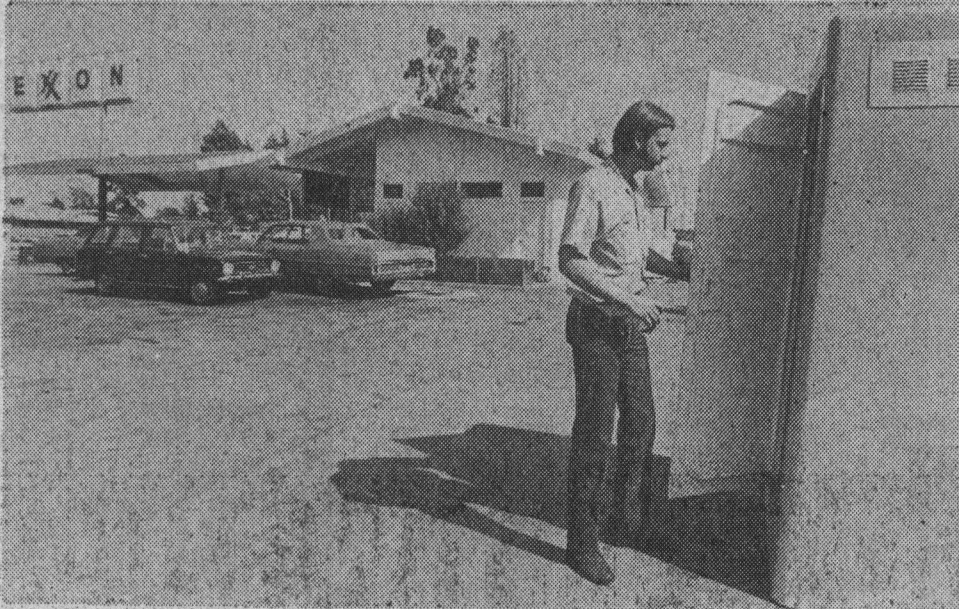
the public complained, so he decided to place chemical toilets near the back of his station. No sooner had the toilets been set in place than a representative of the city's building inspection department arrived, yellow tag in hand, to tell Smith to get rid of the chemical toilets.

Bill Nunes, building inspector for Santa Cruz City, explained that chemical toilets are not allowed in areas that have access to the city's sewer system.

"Both state and municipal codes forbid chemical toilets," said Nunes, "except where there is no access to the sewer system or ... a septic tank. That means that chemical toilets are allowed at construction sites."

Smith objects, however. "The city let the Seaside Company (owners of the boardwalk) put in chemical toilets at the beach. Why

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Gary Smith Examines Forbidden Chemical Toilet.

## Chemical Toilet Is Forbidden

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can't we do the same?"

Nunes had his answer ready.

"In an emergency, there might be some special cases and the code can be set aside. The Seaside Company fits into the category of a public amusement park, and restrooms there are required. So in order to save water, the company has been allowed to install 50 chemical toilets. They are anchored down, and serviced by state-licensed pumpers. They are pumped twice a day and kept clean."

Smith's wife, Ramona, who operates the station along with her husband, added glumly that when people discovered the locked restrooms at the station, they avail themselves of the station's back lot.

"We're willing to pay for chemical toilets," she said.

"We're not willing to have the back lot turned into an open-air toilet."

"That problem," said Nunes, "is a police problem."

The water department, however, might come up with an alternate solution. John McGuire, a spokesman for the Santa Cruz City Water Department, said Friday that gas stations may be given special water allocations so as to be able to keep their rest rooms open.

The city council, in fact, will discuss the special allocation issue during its meeting on Tuesday. McGuire said that the water department has recommended that service stations be allowed to use extra water to keep their rest rooms open, because closed rest rooms "gets to be a problem for visitors."