

The paper towel-hand dryer wars are over

By Alexandra Petri , Updated: December 14, 2012

Hatfields vs. McCoys. Capulets vs. Montagues. Paper vs. Plastic. Democrats vs. Republicans. North vs. South. Beatles vs. Stones. Crips vs. Bloods. People who like to tug their toilet paper over the top of the roll vs. people who prefer to tug it out from behind the roll and, frankly, think the over-the-top people have a screw loose.

Paper towels vs. hand dryers.

In the throes of the Christmas Wars and the “Fiscal Cliff” fight, I am delighted to announce that at least one of the great debates is [over](#). And the correct team has [won](#).

Yes, as the Wall Street Journal noticed, Mayo Clinic completed a [review of studies](#) on the relative efficiency and hygiene of paper towels and hand dryers. And paper towels won a resounding victory. “From a hygiene viewpoint, paper towels are superior to electric air dryers,” the Mayo review’s abstract noted. But it’s not just that they are more hygienic. People prefer them. Studies in 2009 and 2000 found a significant majority (55 percent in the 2009 study, 62 percent in 2000) preferred paper towels to hot air or jet air dryers (no more than 28 percent in either study).

In fact, I defy you to find anyone who actively enjoys hand dryers.

For years, they were the subject of mockery from the same people who thought the highest form of humor was complaints about airplane travel. But those hacks had a point.

Everything about them is terrible. Hot air dryers dry your hand with all the force of six gnomes gently whispering at you. They are like sticking your hand into the mouth of a panting dog. Your hand emerges uncomfortably hot and just as wet as it was before. If you wanted it to be dry, you would have to wipe it on your pants, but you realize that this defeats the whole point of the exercise. Instead, you emerge from the restroom waving your hands in the air like someone expressing indignation in a black-and-white movie.

But the studies found even more that was wrong with them. They irritate the skin. They are noisier. They sound like disgruntled vacuums. They spray bacteria around. People don’t want to use them. And it turns out that the friction paper towels offer is actually an essential ingredient in removing germs.

In other words, not only are hand dryers terrible, they don’t even do the job they were assigned to do. They are like inviting a plumber to fix your leaking toilet.

The plumber makes a lot of noise and irritates you, and when he leaves everything is just as bad as it was before.

No, the science is in. And there's absolutely no excuse for them. If anyone ever comes up to you and tries to argue that hand dryers are just as good as paper towels, slap him with your damp and bacteria-ridden hand. In fact, I'm not sure what we were doing with hand dryers in the first place.

Well, they cost less money than paper towels. Look, walking costs less than flying. Rowing across the Atlantic costs less than taking an airplane.

Some tradeoffs should not be made, and this is one of them. End the dryer. Embrace the towel.

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