

Makeshift toilets part of life in quake-hit city

February 26 2011, by Chris Foley

For Christchurch mother-of-two Nicky White, the city's deadly earthquake has left no room for delicacy as her family struggles with the basics of everyday life such as finding a toilet.

Much of the city's infrastructure was crippled after Tuesday's 6.3-magnitude shake, which claimed at least 123 lives, forcing White and other residents to rely on their own ingenuity.

White, who has no lawn or garden in her apartment block in the suburb of Woolston, has taken to lining her toilet with a large plastic bag.

"I had nowhere to dig so I put a plastic bag in the toilet bowl and when it starts to fill I tie it up and put it in the rubbish bin," she said, adding that at times "it stinks the house out".

Emergency supplies of portable toilets, food and petrol were being rushed into the city, where more than 62,000 homes have no [water supplies](#) and 100,000 properties have lost their connection to the sewers.

As residents battle to bring a sense of normality to their lives, authorities were closely monitoring the health situation in the city.

One of the main concerns has been toilets for people in the most devastated eastern areas, which remain without power and water.

More than 350 people had to be removed from one of the welfare centres housing earthquake refugees because of fears there could be an

outbreak of measles or [diarrhoea](#) and worries about sanitation.

The city's road network has been clogged with vehicles since the deadly quake as people head to the less affected western suburbs to stock up on food at supermarkets and to drain service stations of petrol supplies.

Civil defence officials said 200 portable toilets had been placed in the city and a further 600 were on their way.

In the suburb of Avonside, one resident -- who has refused to leave her damaged home, which was earmarked to be rebuilt after a 7.0 earthquake last September -- said the portable toilets cannot arrive soon enough.

"I've been using a bucket as a makeshift toilet and buried the contents in the garden," she said.

Christchurch mayor Bob Parker said he knew residents were going through a difficult time.

"This will not get easy in a hurry," he told a media conference.

"The next few days as we try to work as hard as possible on restoring services, we need to ask that you support us with your understanding of what we are doing."

In areas without electricity, residents have fired up their barbecues to use as community kitchens, prompting one energy company to offer free refills of LPG gas bottles.

The line of people at one service station stretched for more than 50 metres (yards) as people took advantage of the offer.

Owner Robert Wales said he was filling a bottle a minute and some of the people arriving were giving him supplies and donations to pass on to people who were struggling.

"Someone gave us NZ\$100 (\$75), others NZ\$10, and I've told them we'll pick out the people who are really affected and give it to them."

Officials said food and petrol supplies were now reaching Christchurch and there was no need to panic buy.

Supermarket manager Justin Blackler said people had been coming from all over Christchurch to his store in the Western districts where they were mainly buying bulk supplies of essential items including food, water, candles.

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