

## **The Blair VIP: the origin of its name and further insights by Peter Morgan**

To understand the origin of the name ‘Blair VIP’, a bit of historical background is needed. In the early 1970’s I designed what I called the Blair Latrine when I worked for the Ministry of Health’s Blair Research Laboratory. The latrine was a ventilated pit toilet, where a screened vent pipe was used not only as a ventilator to remove odours but also as a fly trap. It was the forerunner of what became more widely known as the VIP toilet. I called it the Blair Latrine or Blair toilet after Dr Dyson Blair who had encouraged me to look at sanitation and water supplies about a year after I arrived in what was then Rhodesia in 1972.

Dr Blair had been Secretary for Health in the early days of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The laboratory was named after him. When I knew him, he was retired and came to work at the laboratory to help whenever needed. He was a great inspiration to me and also a walking encyclopaedia of practical knowledge about public health in the tropics. I named my creation the Blair Toilet after him. VIP stands for ventilated improved pit, a name coined by the World Bank, I believe.

The Blair toilet (or Blair VIP as it became known a few years after independence in Zimbabwe in 1980) was the first VIP and became a national standard in Zimbabwe. I also designed a multi-compartment Blair VIP for schools. These technologies have been built in huge numbers, and remain to this day the standards set by the Zimbabwean government.

When I got involved in ecosan (ecological sanitation) some years ago, I looked at recycling and toilet design in detail. Because I had been working in sanitation issues before this time, one of my aims was to try to bring the well established methods and the new concept of recycling together – in my case make pit toilet technology more ecological.

The Arborloo and Fossa alterna are two of the results of this marriage of the old and the new! I also did quite a lot of work on urine diversion dehydration toilets (UDDTs). Furthermore, I have also examined the effect of urine and toilet compost on plant growth. My aim has always been to push the “state of the art” forward. That is what research should be about: Trying new ideas and concepts.



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