

Tobacco firms stub out ad woes: Survey

Malathy Iyer | TNN

Mumbai: Even as the Smoke-Free Mumbai Campaign shifts gear by targeting taxis and BEST buses, a survey has found that tobacco companies have found a glitzy way of advertising their wares.

Display boards—commissioned and maintained by tobacco companies—have multiplied across the city. Worse, they either blatantly or subtly violate the stringent regulations laid down in the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition) Act of 2003, reveals a survey by the Cancer Patient Aid Association (CPAA) conducted between May and July.

There are 125 displays in five South Mumbai wards. "About 65% of these boards were bigger than the size set by the law," said Dr Shital Raval of CPAA. The Act says these boards can only be put up outside outlets selling cigarettes and that they should not be more than 60 cm x 45 cm.

"But we found non-tobacco selling shops such as restaurants, juice centres and, shockingly, even toy stores, putting up tobacco display boards. Moreover, in 64% of the boards, the background colours of the ads match with that of the tobacco brands," said Raval.

The CPAA, an voluntary organisation that helps cancer patients, has found that ever since the tobacco law came into effect in 2005, there has been a dramatic increase in the display boards at points of sale. "Most of these boards follow the same colour code as the cigarette pack, suggesting surrogate advertising," she added.

Incidentally, the survey found that a fourth of the boards was backlit which is not permissible under the law.

"The Act permits advertisements of cigarettes only at outlets that sell the product. Once the outlet is closed for the day, the advertisement should not be visible. But we

find that the ads on backlit boards are visible at all times of the day and night," said Dr Surendra Shastri, who heads the cancer prevention department of Tata Memorial Hospital and is a part of the Smoke-Free Mumbai Campaign. The CPAA survey showed that the companies were targeted shops along main roads or near teaching institutes. "In one instance, we found a toy shop with a display board



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SECOND PHASE BEGINS

The Smoke-Free Mumbai Campaign, which started two years ago, will enter its second phase. In the first phase, smoking at public places was banned. Starting September 1, smoking inside public vehicles, such as taxis and buses, will also be prohibited. "We have already met union and RTO officials. We will soon distribute stickers to taxi drivers," said Dr Surendra Shastri of the Smoke-Free Mumbai Campaign.

of a tobacco company, the reason being its proximity to a college," said a CPAA official.

Vendors whose shops sported the display boards said they were paid by the companies to put up the boards. "Even the electricity bills are paid by the company," said an official.

The anti-tobacco Act was introduced after intense campaign and the growing realisation that tobacco causes 56.4% of cancers in men and 44.9% of cancers in women in India.