

# Don't huff and puff, Just dial the BMC soon

Madhavi Rajadhyaksha | TNN

**Mumbai:** If you spotted someone smoking in your office or lighting up at a restaurant and didn't know whom to complain to, now there's help at hand. In two weeks, the BMC will launch a toll-free helpline where Mumbaikars can dial in to report violations of the ban on smoking in public places.

The ban came into effect on October 2, 2008, making it punishable for anyone to smoke in restaurants, pubs, auditoriums, offices, railway stations and airports. Civic and state government authorities have often drawn flak for their shoddy imple-

mentations in March.

Mumbaikars, it appears, are all for the ban. A survey conducted by voluntary organisation Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health across four metros in December 2008 found that 98% of the 300-odd Mumbaikars interviewed favoured the ban on smoking in workplaces and public places, and an overwhelming majority found restaurants and bars "more enjoyable" now that they are smoke-free. (See Box)

Mumbaikars surveyed also patted government agencies for their implementation of the ban with 98% success, saying it was excellent, much higher than the faith expressed in gov-

## VOX POPULI ON SMOKING BAN

**WHAT:** Survey conducted in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai

**WHEN:** December 2008

**HOW MANY PEOPLE INTERVIEWED:**

**1,026**

**FINDINGS:**

• Nine out of 10 Indians favoured the ban on smoking in offices and public places. In Mumbai, 98% favoured the ban

• **72%** of Indians said restaurants and bars were healthier and more enjoyable after the ban

• **91%** of Indians said it bothered them when they were exposed to second-hand smoke

• All the Mumbaikars interviewed in the survey said that the government should implement the ban

mentations of the ban compared with other cities.

However, on Friday, the BMC announced the setting up of the Smoke-free Cell along with voluntary organisations to ensure its better implementation. "We have levied fines of Rs 78,000 since October 2," said assistant municipal commissioner Kishore Gajbhaye. The Smoke-free Cell to be housed in Kasturba Hospital will rope in hoteliers, hospitals and other agencies and put their personnel through training sessions about the ban.

The sudden buzz of activity comes in the wake of the upcoming 14th World Conference on Tobacco or Health

ment agencies by citizens in other metros such as Chennai, Kolkata and Delhi.

But not everyone agrees with the findings. Vincent Nazareth of the NGO Crusade Against Tobacco says state government agencies have only been passing the buck with regard to the ban's implementation. "A helpline is a welcome step, but only time will tell whether civic agencies will really take action on complaints and how soon they'll act," he said, pointing out that he had repeatedly complained about smoking in airport premises, but no agency has intervened till date.

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