

Public puff ban goes up in smoke in state

Kounteya Sinha | TNN

New Delhi: The ambitious ban on smoking in public places has failed to take off in most of the states.

Ever since October 2, when the ban formally came into force, only eight states/UTs have started imposing fines on those caught violating the law. Repeated reminders by the Union health ministry to large states like West Bengal and Maharashtra to implement the ban in toto have fallen on deaf ears. The ministry is all set to send a strongly-worded letter in the first week of January to these states reminding them of the ban.

In the ministry's latest state-wise evaluation of fines collected, four states/UTs—Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Gujarat and Chandigarh—have been found to be aggressively leading the campaign. TN has fined 5,710 smokers collecting Rs 7.18 lakh as fine since October 2 followed by Delhi which has challan-ed 2,084 individuals and collected Rs 2.86 lakh as fine.

Even though Gujarat started challaning only in November, it has taken to task 285 smokers and collected Rs 84,000. While Chandigarh has fined 920 violators, Kerala has challaned 500 smokers and Mizoram 245. Andhra Pradesh

has collected Rs 1.17 lakh as fine. Goa and Sikkim have put their ban enforcing authority in place and will start challaning smokers from January 1. Jharkhand and Nagaland are in the process

of developing the enforcement mechanism. Dr P C Gupta from the Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health told TOI: "Though the ban on smoking in public places is well supported by the general public, not all states have implemented it." According to ministry sources, states like West Bengal, Maharashtra, Bi-

har, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, UP, Rajasthan and Kar-nataka have shown little eagerness to implement the ban by challaning violators. Some of these states are yet to put in place even the requisite mechanism to implement the ban. "We have repeatedly sent them guidance sheets to help them implement the smoke-free rules. The state health departments have been made responsible," health ministry officials said.

The state health departments are supposed to sensitize, train and empower law enforcers like police, food and drug inspectors about the ban and set up squads for its monitoring, enforcement and compliance. They are also supposed to empower authorized officers to compound the offence and impose appropriate fine up to Rs 200 on each violator. "The department is expected to print challan books and create a separate head of account in which the fine collected is deposited," an official said. The Union health ministry is planning to expand the National Tobacco Control Programme from nine states at present to 21 in the next fortnight.

SMOKE SCREEN	
State	Smokers fined
TN	5,710
Delhi	2,084
Chandigarh	920
Kerala	500
Gujarat	285

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