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Flying squad needed to enforce smoking ban

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Flying squad needed to enforce smoking ban

Hoteliers say they face difficulties in implementing the law, particularly at night

Deepa Suryanarayan

Three men go to a restaurant, eat and drink their fill, and leave saying they are going out for a few minutes for a smoke. But the joke is on the owner, for the men vanish without a trace, leaving their hefty bill unpaid.

This has happened to me at least two times, said Hiren Bhalla, owner of Sanket Hotel at Prabhadevi. Bhalla and a handful of other restaurant, hotel and bar owners attended the inaugural session of a series of workshops being organised by the Tata Memorial Hospital, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and the Healis Seksaria Institute of

Public Health, where they discussed the difficulties they face while implementing the ban on smoking.

The workshops will continue till the end of the month. The idea is to generate awareness among restaurant owners and to encourage bilateral talks, said Dr Pranita Tipre, assistant health officer, in-charge of smoke-free Mumbai cell. "Customers are rude and aggressive when we try to enforce the ban. This is a major problem in bars, particularly in the night, when a majority of customers get drunk and start fights," complained Bhalla.

"What we want is a flying squad equipped with the authority to deal with such errant customers. The flying squad should function for three-to-six months, and should have the authority to fine or arrest such troublesome customers," said Vishwapal Shetty, joint secretary, Association of Hotel and Restaurant



owners (AHAR).

Around 6,500 restaurants are a part of AHAR, and over 90% of restaurants, hotels, pubs and bars in the city have complied with the ban on smoking, said Shetty.

After enforcing the ban, my hotel is neater. The sofa cushions don't have burns. My wait-

Vishwapal Shetty

Joint secretary, AHAR

We want a flying squad which should function for three-to-six months, and should have the authority to fine or arrest troublesome customers."

ers are happy as they don't have to run to buy cigarettes for patrons. And most importantly, I am able to sit at the counter for several hours at a stretch," said Satish Shetty, owner of Hotel Raviraj, Worli, a non-smoker who used to spend just four hours at his hotel before the ban.

AHAR demanded that the BMC give them standardised 'No Smoking' signboards and pamphlets explaining the finer points of the law. They also asked for the fine amount to be raised significantly to deter smokers.

The idea of the workshop is to tell restaurant and pub owners that smoke-free laws can be enforced and that they will not cause economic losses. Smoke-free environment is the right of the owners and employees, said Dr Surendra Shastri, preventive oncologist, Tata Memorial Hospital.