

Smoking ban fails to burn holes in profits

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Mumbai: When New York administrators decided to ban smoking at public places in March 2003, owners of restaurants and pubs feared that their profits would take a beating. They reasoned that the ban would keep smokers away, thereby reducing the number of patrons. This, they felt, would adversely affect their finances.

But mayor Michael Bloomberg went ahead with the ban and, a year later, presented statistics that astonished the world: business tax receipts (tax paid to the state/city) had increased by 8.7% in the restaurant and bar segment.

GLOBAL TREND

- In **2006**, Hong Kong made its anti-smoking rules more stringent by extending them to include the workplace, markets and karaoke establishments
- Ireland introduced a complete ban on smoking in **2004** after it found that partial bans were ineffective. In less than a year, the country reported **94%** compliance in enclosed workplaces and **98%** in pubs
- When California state introduced a ban on smoking at workplaces, only **65.2%** supported it. But from 1998 to 2000, the support for the ban jumped to **72.6%**
- Other countries that have in recent past banned smoking in public places include Italy, France, Egypt, Scotland and Panama, among others

"The study also found that employment in New York's bars had increased by 10,600 in the same period," says Dr Surendra Shastri, head of preventive oncology department at Tata Memorial Hospital, Parel. Incidentally, the Bloomberg Foundation is funding Tata Memorial Hospital's efforts to make Mumbai smoke-free.

With India choosing to introduce a ban on smoking at public places from October 2, a drop in revenue has been worrying Indian restaurateurs as well.

But experts quote examples from across the globe to underline that smoking regulations are not only good for public health, but also make good business sense.

Take, for instance, the case of New York. After the ban on smoking was imposed, 23% residents started eating out more often. Smokers were out, but the number of non-smokers made up for the loss.

The benefits of smoking regulations are many—from cleaner air to less chronic diseases—say health activists. The ban, they claim, also encourages smokers to kick the habit.

Recently, a study conducted across four Indian cities by the Healis Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health showed that a overwhelming majority of Mumbaiers — 96%— supported a ban on smoking at public places.

At present, 11 states in the US, nine provinces in Canada, five European Nations, New Zealand and regions of Australia have prohibited smoking at workplace.

The main reason that countries have banned smoking from public spaces is the realisation that it is one of the biggest contributors to ill-health. "A study carried out across 42 pubs in Ireland before and after the ban showed 83% reduction in suspended particulate matter inside these places," says Dr Shastri.

A study by Mark D Eisner in JAMA's October 2006 issue showed that "creation of smoke-free workplaces has another important benefit—a higher rate of smoking cessation among active smokers". The study found that those who continue to smoke reduce their daily cigarette consumption.

Smoke-free workplaces would decrease second-hand smoke exposure, improve respiratory health, prevent chronic disease and extend lifespan. "Positive health effects occur in as little as one month after cessation of second-hand smoke exposure," the study had pointed out.

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