

DH conducts joint operation with Police against waterpipe smoking in no smoking areas

The Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the Department of Health (DH) yesterday (June 13) evening conducted a joint operation with the Police against illegal waterpipe smoking activities in no smoking areas in Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui.

During the operation, law enforcement officers (including plainclothes officers) issued a total of nine fixed penalty notices (FPNs) to persons illegally smoking waterpipes at two bars. The TACO's investigation is ongoing and prosecution may also be taken against operators of the bars/restaurants who are suspected of contravening the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) (the Ordinance) and the Criminal Procedure Ordinance (Cap. 221) for aiding and abetting smoking offences.

Under the Ordinance, conducting a smoking act in a statutory no smoking area (such as indoor areas of bars or restaurants) is prohibited. Any person doing a smoking act in statutory no smoking areas are liable to a fixed penalty of \$1,500. Moreover, where tobacco products (including waterpipes) are sold, in bars or otherwise, restrictions on the sale and promotion of tobacco products stipulated in the Ordinance apply. Venue managers of statutory no smoking areas are empowered by the Ordinance to request the smoking offender to cease the act; if the offender is not co-operative, he/she may contact the Police for assistance.

Also, under the Criminal Procedure Ordinance, any person who aids, abets, counsels or procures the commission by another person of any offence shall be guilty of the like offence. A spokesman for the DH appeals to operators and venue managers of bars/restaurants not to assist any person in breaching the statutory smoking prohibition, or provide a waterpipe apparatus and tobacco to customers for use.

A DH spokesman stressed that the TACO will follow up and investigate every complaint about illegal smoking, and will conduct inspections and take enforcement actions in the venue concerned. The TACO will also conduct joint inspections and enforcement actions (including plainclothes operations) with other law enforcement agencies from time to time with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of law enforcement. The DH will continue to closely monitor and to take stringent enforcement actions to tackle illegal waterpipe smoking. In the past 12 months, the TACO conducted 25 decoy operations against illegal waterpipe smoking activities in no smoking areas. A total of 77 FPNs were issued against smoking offenders and while 74 summonses were issued to staff members and operators of the bars/restaurants for other related offences.

â€‹The spokesman said that waterpipe is a smoking product and its combustion of fuel (e.g. charcoal) releases high concentrations of carbon

monoxide. Due to deeper inhalation and longer smoking session, waterpipe users usually inhale more toxins than they would when smoking cigarettes. A typical one-hour waterpipe smoking session exposes the user to 100 to 200 times the volume of smoke inhaled from a single conventional cigarette. Besides, sharing the waterpipe apparatus increases the risk of infectious disease transmission such as tuberculosis. For more information on the hazards of waterpipe smoking, please visit www.livetobaccofree.hk/pdfs/waterpipe_leaflet_new.pdf. The spokesman cautions against waterpipe smoking or the use of other smoking products. Smokers should quit smoking as early as possible for their own health and that of others.