

Honduras seeks to stop smoking -- even at home

February 22 2011, By FREDDY CUEVAS , Associated Press

(AP) -- Lighting up a cigarette at home could bring a visit from Honduran police if a family member or even a visitor complains about secondhand smoke.

A new law that took effect Monday banning smoking in most public and private spaces doesn't actually outlaw cigarettes inside homes, but it does have a provision allowing people to file complaints about secondhand smoke in homes.

Violations would bring a verbal warning on the first offense. After that could come arrest and a \$311 fine - the equivalent of the monthly minimum wage in this Central American country.

Even some anti-smoking advocates suspect that part of the law may not work.

"It seems its intention is to educate by way of complaints, a move that I do not find very feasible," said Armando Peruga, a program manager at the World Health Organization's Tobacco-Free Initiative.

He did praise Honduras for adopting a broad anti-smoking law, noting it is only the 29th nation to adopt such a law out of WHO's 193 member states.

But Peruga said the clause allowing family members to call police on their smoker relatives is confusing. The clause "does not make much

sense since the law clearly does not prohibit smoking at homes."

The law bans smoking in most closed public or private spaces and orders [smokers](#) to stand at least six feet (1.8 meters) away from nonsmokers in any open space.

The law explicitly bans smoking in schools, gas stations, nightclubs, restaurants, bars, buses, taxis, stadiums and cultural centers but it doesn't clearly ban smoking at home.

Still, one clause says that "families or individuals may complain to law enforcement authorities when smokers expose them to [secondhand smoke](#) in private places and family homes."

"The law is clear and we will comply with it," said Rony Portillo, director of the Institute to Prevent Alcoholism and [Drug Addiction](#). "Authorities will intervene (at a home) when someone makes a complaint."

Some say the law will be almost impossible to enforce in a country of 8 million people with a rampant crime problem and only 12,000 police officers.

"Police won't be able to enforce it because they can barely keep up with the crime wave that has been overwhelming us to be able to go after those who are smoking at home," said Jose Martinez, a 38-year-old computer engineer who has smoked for 20 years.

The law also outlaws all advertising for tobacco products and requires photos of lungs affected by cancer to be placed on cigarette packs. Tobacco and cigarette companies have 60 days to comply with both requirements.

In Honduras, 30 percent of the people smoke, and nine out of 10 Hondurans suffering from acute bronchitis live in homes where there is a smoker, according to Honduran health authorities.

For every dollar that the tobacco industry makes in Honduras, the state spends \$10 to fight smoking-related diseases, according to the Health Department.

The law says businesses, such as bars or restaurants, that allow smoking could be fined between \$1,000 and \$6,000 and repeat offenders could be shut down.

"The law is stupid because it bans smoking in bars or nightclubs, and everyone knows that people who go there smoke, and if they don't like it, they shouldn't come and that's that," said Gustavo Valladares, a bar manager and smoker.

Nonsmokers see it differently.

"It was about time that the government did something," said elementary school teacher Esteban Quijano, a nonsmoker. "I like to visit bars, but I hate the smoke of others. Most of my friends smoke and I know that it indirectly hurts me and now it will be different. I support the law."

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