

Choked-up Milan takes smoking ban outside

January 20 2021, by Brigitte Hagemann



Milan became the first city in Italy to ban smoking in many open-air public places such as parks, stadiums, bus stops and even cemeteries

"It's about time they passed this law. We're fed up with this smoke!" declared Massimo Gabbiadini, a shopkeeper in Piazza del Duomo, after Milan banned smoking in many outdoor places.

"But I will wait and see if the rules are enforced. In the north of Europe people respect the law, but in Italy?" the 54-year-old told AFP.

Italy's financial and fashion capital on Tuesday became the first city in the country to ban smoking in many open-air public places such as parks, stadiums, bus stops and even cemeteries.

There are exemptions for lighting up in isolated spots, at a distance of 10 metres (30 feet) or more from other smokers—as well as for [electronic cigarettes](#).

The usual throngs of tourists outside Milan's cathedral were absent on Tuesday because of coronavirus restrictions, which saw the city placed back in partial lockdown at the weekend.

Among those walking past the police officers standing guard, many with cigarettes between their lips seemed unaware of the change in the law.

"There's no sign saying you can't smoke in certain places," complained Floris Dethmers, an 18-year-old model in Milan for the men's fashion week shows.

"I understand that it's banned inside. But outside, I want the freedom to smoke."

Harmful to lungs

But the measure has been largely welcomed in Milan, including by smokers such as Maria Luigia di Toma, an unemployed receptionist.

"I think it's fair, because smoking is really annoying for people around you," the 63-year-old said.



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But Milan has taken it one step further as part of a wider battle against pollution.

The new ban aims to "reduce PM10 [fine particles](#), which are harmful to the lungs, and protect the health of citizens against active and passive smoking in public places," according to the [local council](#).

Situated in the middle of the industrial Po Valley and choked with [road traffic](#), Milan regularly breaks air quality records—and eight percent of the PM10 particles in the city are due to smoking.

Fines for breaking the new law range from 40 to 240 euros (\$48 to \$290), although they will be only gradually introduced.

By January 1, 2025, however, Milan will have a total ban on smoking in the open air.

Authorities here are heartened by the relative ease with which the national ban on indoor [smoking](#) was imposed—and its impact.

Since 2005, the number of smokers aged 15 and over in Italy has fallen by one million to 11.6 million, according to a study by the ISS health agency.

Leaning against a statue in Piazza del Duomo, Laura Beraldo says she is not ready to give up her 20-a-day habit.

"I don't blame cigarettes for the smog, but the traffic and global warming," said the 21-year-old, who works for an NGO.

And for now, "there are no restrictions on the freedom to smoke, as long as I respect the 10-metre rule", she said, smiling.

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