

Public smoking will be penalised under new law

Story: **Mark-Anthony Vinorkor**

SMOKING in public will now attract a fine of GH¢9,000 or a three-year imprisonment or both under the new Public Health Law.

Under the law, smoking has been banned in places such as the streets, homes, vehicles, bars, restaurants and other places of public use.

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health, Alhaji Muntaka Mubarak, who stated this at a workshop on the Public Health Law in Accra yesterday, said under the law, one could not smoke anywhere if the next person close by was a non-smoker.

Therefore, he said, even in a smoker's home or car, he or she could not engage in the activity if there was a person with whom he or she was a non-smoker.

If the smoker was the only person present, he said, he or she had to ensure that the smoke emanating from the cigarette did not permeate the environment,

otherwise he or she would be deemed to have flouted the law.

Alhaji Muntaka said in bars and restaurants, special places were to be created for smokers, explaining that even in those cases, there had to be mechanisms in place to ensure that the smoke did not escape.

He said the law also made it illegal for children under 18 to be sent to buy tobacco and also handle or light cigarettes for adults.

Alhaji Muntaka, who is the Member of Parliament (MP) for Asawase, said the law had no transitional period and would be implemented as soon as it received Presidential assent.

He said it was the duty of every Ghanaian, apart from the law enforcement agencies and inspectors to be appointed by the Food and Drugs Board (FDB), to arrest anyone who flouted the law.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Representative in Ghana, Mr

Idrissa Sow, said the law was one of the greatest achievements in the area of protecting public health.

He promised that the WHO would assist Ghana to train enforcers and support moves to exact levies on tobacco products.

Mr Sow advised non-governmental organisations to monitor and participate in the implementation of the law after it had received presidential assent.

A Principal Health Planner of the Ministry of Health, Mr Sulemana Bening, said the government would vigorously enforce the law and enact the necessary LIs to accompany it.

He said the concerns raised by some non-governmental organisations over the failure to include clauses on pictorial warnings of the dangers associated with smoking would be addressed.

While nicotine itself isn't thought to be carcinogenic, the highly addictive drug is toxic and potentially lethal in large doses. Long-term smokers have a

much higher risk of developing a host of life threatening diseases.

Just about any cancer one can think of, including cancer of the lung, mouth, nose, voice box, lip, tongue, nasal sinus, esophagus, throat, pancreas, bone marrow, kidney, cervix, liver, bladder and stomach can result from smoking.

The heart and the lungs are most easily damaged by smoking. Lung diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema, are largely due to smoking. Heart disease, which includes coronary artery disease, heart attack and stroke, are far more common in smokers.

One of the effects of nicotine is constricting the blood vessels, which in turn causes high blood pressure. Another effect is raising the heart rate, which adds extra stress on the heart.

Smoking affects not only the heart but also every part of the circulatory system. The blood becomes thicker and stickier, further taxing the heart. The lining of the blood vessels is damaged, allowing fat deposits to adhere, and this is most likely a significant cause of arteriosclerosis or hardening of the arteries.

As a result, diminished circulation to the feet and hands leads to painful neuropathy and impaired ability to fight local infections. This can lead to gangrene, which sometimes requires amputation.

The inhaled smoke contains many harmful substances, such as tar, carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, heavy metals and free radicals. Each of these damages the body in various ways. Tar is sticky and brown, containing many chemicals known to be carcinogenic, including benzopyrene. It also stains the teeth, fingernails and lung tissue.

It causes damage to the mouth, teeth and gums, as well as ulcers of the digestive system.

Osteoporosis is caused by a leeching of calcium from the bones and this predisposes smokers to fractures.



• Alhaji Mubarak addressing the press conference on smoking. Picture: EMMANUEL ONOMA-BARNES