

Smokers get warnings as Orchard goes smoke-free

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Orchard Road is now smoke-free, as a precinct-wide smoking ban kicked in yesterday, prohibiting smokers from lighting up in public areas except within designated smoking areas (DSAs).

Enforcement officers from the National Environment Agency (NEA), dressed in white No Smoking Zone polo T-shirts, were on patrol in the shopping district on the first day of the new year, nabbing smokers in the new prohibited areas.

These smokers were given verbal warnings and directed to the DSAs.

One smoker was Indonesian tourist Budi Mulyawan, 38, who was found smoking close to a standing-litter bin in front of Ngee Ann City. He told The Straits Times: "I didn't know about the zone. I just saw a bin, and so I smoked. The officers explained to me that Orchard Road is now a no-smoking zone. If I want to smoke, I have to do it in the designated areas. I understand. No problem."

Another smoker, 23-year-old Ms Nur Fafa, was spotted smoking on a bench in front of Wisma Atria shopping mall. The Singaporean, who works in retail, told ST: "I get it that they (the authorities) want a healthier environment, but the nearest smoking area is at Ion Orchard."

"Smoke breaks are very short, and now we will spend half the time walking to the smoking area."

Over 40 DSAs are available within the Orchard Road no-smoking zone. During the initial three-month advisory period, officers will engage smokers and advise them to indulge in their habit within the DSAs.

NEA said about 30 officers will be deployed daily and this presence may be augmented by another 45 to 50 officers and volunteers on weekends and busier periods.

From April, enforcement action will be taken against all offenders.

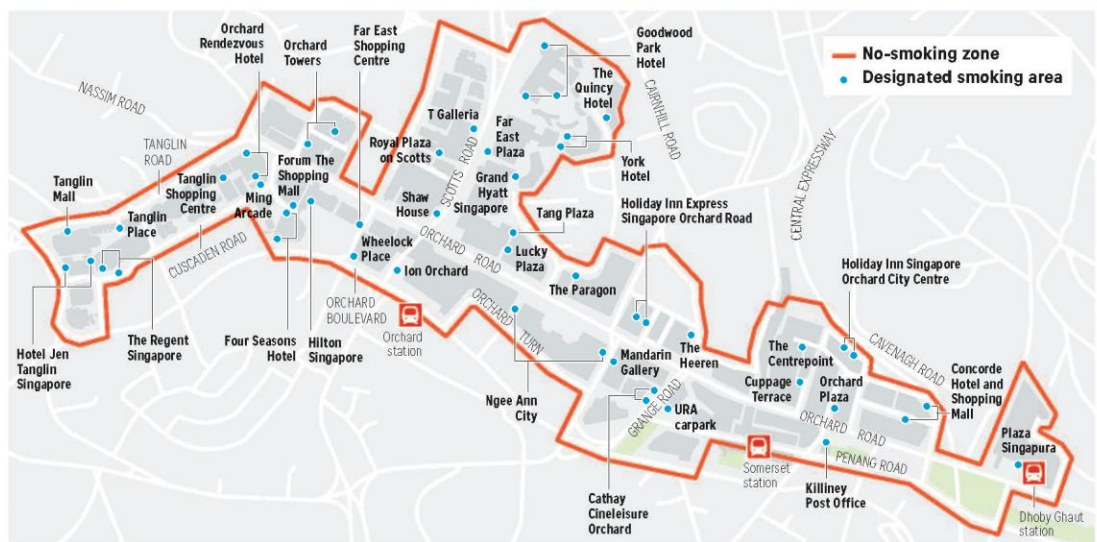
Publicity has been stepped up to increase awareness of the no-smoking zone. Signs have been placed on bins and some lamp posts within the zone. Advertisements have also been put up at selected MRT stations and bus stops.

Businesses have chipped in. The Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard City Centre hotel, for example, has been actively communicating to its guests and corporate clients about Orchard Road's transformation into a no-smoking zone – and how the hotel is among the smoke-free premises – through verbal and online means.

Bins with ashtrays have been replaced with those without ashtrays, and directional signage guiding smokers to the nearest DSAs has also been put up at the hotel's side entrances.

Similarly, Royal Plaza on Scotts

No-smoking zone



Source: NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AGENCY ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

has put up a sign at the hotel's entrance to inform guests of the no-smoking zone and the nearest DSAs.

Booklets on the new regulation from NEA are also available at the front desk for guests to take away.

Experts interviewed expect the ban to lead to a reduction in second-hand smoke leading to health benefits for shoppers and visitors.

Dr Rohit Khurana, a consultant cardiologist with The Harley Street

Heart & Vascular Centre at Gleneagles Hospital, said second-hand smoke contains thousands of toxic chemicals, some of which are carcinogenic. Exposure can lead to short-term effects such as the exacerbation of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as more frequent and severe asthma attacks, which children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to.

Long-term exposure can lead to an

increased incidence of coronary heart and vascular disease, which can result in heart attacks and strokes, as well as lung cancer, he said.

Associate Professor Alex Cook, vice-dean of research at the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, said there is clear evidence linking smoking bans to improved cardiovascular health outcomes and fewer deaths from smoking-related

illnesses. The greatest health effects of a ban are also likely to result from a denormalisation of cigarette use, he added.

The number of fines imposed for smoking in prohibited areas has been increasing in recent years, from about 19,000 in 2016 to more than 22,000 a year later and 28,000 in the first 11 months of 2018.

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