

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a lit cigarette against a metal grate. The cigarette is lit, with a small flame and smoke. The grate is made of metal and has a grid-like pattern. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a wooden structure.

Stubbing out cigarette litter

Levels of cigarette litter on our streets are set to rise following implementation of the so-called 'smoking ban', and the Government is proposing that business be liable for the big clean-up. Charles Hamshaw-Thomas of CSR Solutions has some advice for those affected.

Whether we like it or not, the legislation on smoking in 'enclosed public places' - already implemented in Wales and due in Northern Ireland on 30 April and 1 July in England - means that smoking in virtually all workplaces will be banned.

The last issue of FMUK featured a very useful article on the specific details of the new Smoke-free (Premises and Enforcement) Regulations, outlining the implications on signage, guest accommodation and the fine regime. The gritty issue of cigarette litter was also touched upon.

Critically, Defra's proposals, published for consultation, that corporate responsibility should be extended into a new area such that businesses will have to "clear up litter in the immediate area of their premises, including that created by their customers, and to install disposal facilities or risk a fixed penalty notice of up to £110" were outlined. Should this proposal become law, countless thousands of businesses will need to devise a strategy for ensuring they can comply. There are many challenges involved, not least a possible lack of interest in the smoking issue among certain sectors. Research among local businesses by the North East Chamber of Commerce - published in a guide by the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health (CIEH), and Action on Smoking and Health

(ASH) called the Achieving Smoke Freedom Tool Kit - revealed a degree of apathy to the purpose behind and likely benefits of the smoking ban. Identified barriers included:

- Smoking is not seen as a key issue
- Some factories and other workplaces tolerate smoking and have no concerns about it, nor any desire to tackle it
- Perhaps most significant is the following: There is a general frustration amongst employers who feel they are 'doing the State's job' by collecting taxes and administering benefits, and they are not keen to be responsible for health promotion in the workplace also.

Regardless of what such businesses may think, they are stuck both with the ban and the additional responsibilities for keeping their premises smoke-free that come with it. And not just smoke-free - litter-free too.

In the template workplace smoking policy provided in the same document, one paragraph reads:

"Facilities for disposal of smoking refuse etc

Smoking may be permitted as appropriate on (organisation) land, but will not be permitted inside (organisation) buildings. Where smoking is permitted on land owned by (organisation), receptacles will be provided

for the disposal of cigarette ends and other waste smoking materials."

So, if some businesses have genuinely not regarded smoking litter as a significant issue in the past, it is a very real and extremely important concern today. And if the Defra proposals become law, it is one with a potentially significant impact on the bottom line.

Today in the UK, the sheer scale of the cigarette litter problem is not sufficiently widely recognised. The facts are shocking. Cigarettes account for over 40 per cent of all litter dropped in this country, rising to some 90 per cent in some locations - and a staggering 122 tonnes of cigarette litter is dropped on this country's streets every day. The problem is getting worse all the time, with levels rising in the UK by over 20 per cent in the last four years.

And evidence from around the world shows that it's set to get even worse following the ban. Some of this evidence is from close to home. In Dublin, for example, where a ban was imposed in 2003, cigarette litter rose by nearly 20 per cent in the year that followed - and even before the ban, 63 per cent of the city's litter was from cigarettes.

The Scottish ban came into force in March 2006, and an Edinburgh cleanliness survey the following September found

cigarette litter in 98 per cent of the sites it checked, significantly up on a year earlier. Within days of the smoking ban taking effect in Wales, a dramatic increase in cigarette butts was being reported. The representative of one Cardiff Traders' Association has already said "the streets are like a constant ashtray". And evidence from across the world is showing that the problem is at its worst outside buildings where people are no longer allowed to smoke – restaurants, bars, entertainment venues, public buildings, shops, offices and more.

The question of responsibility is at the heart of successfully addressing the matter, and it seems that no one to date (with the exception of Local Authorities) has acknowledged any responsibility for the thorny problem of cigarette litter.

It is now clear, with an enforcement regime under development that targets both individuals and organisations caught breaking the rules (by smoking or allowing smoking, by littering or failing to clean up), that responsibilities are becoming more widely assigned.

It is also clear that there is a comparatively straightforward way for business to meet their responsibilities: that is, simply to accept the new world for what it is, and to comply with what's expected of them. There is help available, and the Achieving Smoke Freedom Tool Kit contains useful advice on developing and implementing a workplace smoking policy. This sets out a five-step plan, from setting up a working party, informing the workforce and consulting them to developing the policy and implementing it.

It is a model that works, and we are helping businesses introduce it to their workplaces in a form that reflects their precise needs.

More widely, though, I feel it reflects the sort of thinking that is needed across the community if public places throughout the UK are not to be swamped in cigarette litter.

It comes back to responsibility and the need to acknowledge and share it – among governments and local authorities, tobacco manufacturers, tobacco retailers, landlords/venue operators and business proprietors. All of these stakeholders have a responsibility to encourage behavioural change among smokers – so that more of them dispose responsibly of their litter – and it is only through a combined approach that a sustainable solution is likely to be achieved.

One highly successful and effective example of such thinking was in evidence last year, when Colchester Council, one of more than 200 local authorities to have run specific anti-cigarette litter campaigns, orchestrated a tremendously successful campaign with the participation and support of over 650 local businesses and retailers.

What they did was simple – and others have achieved similar levels of success using the same approach. They concentrated on encouraging smokers to change their littering behaviour, with a programme combining a mix of public information and the resources needed to enable change – resources like more disposal options and easy, cost-effective access to personal ashtrays. Having raised awareness, and with disposal options being made available, the use of sanctions was more readily legitimised and enabled the message that littering is unacceptable to be reinforced. A staggering 86.6 per cent reduction in levels of cigarette litter was achieved. By way of example, in Dundee – where much to the anger of many locals, £50 fines are



being handed out to people caught dropping butts – there is a different story.

One angry local is Valerie Heath, who was quoted by the local newspaper as saying: "This is absolutely ludicrous. My husband was out doing the shopping today and said that he couldn't see any posters or anything about the fines. People are not going to know. What are people meant to do?"

These experiences demonstrate the difference between two opposing approaches to dealing with a public littering nuisance – which can be readily applied to implementing a new smoking policy in the workplace. Going in heavy-handedly will create antagonism and conflict. Balancing the approach between education and facilitation before moving to enforcement is far more likely to gain consensus and a positive outcome.

So whether or not we resent what is being seen as having to do more of the Government's dirty work, we have to face facts. The issue won't go away, so we need to do what we can to introduce it smoothly and with the agreement of all stakeholders, providing the information and resources that people require to comply.

That way, stress levels won't rise to the point where non-smokers are forced to take up the habit and smokers constantly dream about the next opportunity to indulge.

The Achieving Smoke Freedom Tool Kit can be downloaded at: www.cieh.org/knowledge/publichealth/smokefreeworkplacesandpublicplaces/achievingSmokeFreedomToolkit.htm

