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## Mangalore police drive not even a smokescreen

Though hundreds can be seen smoking in city, only 38 persons were booked this year

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MOHIT M. RAO

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There's a need to curb down on those smoking in public. File photo.

On a relatively traffic-free road near Kadri Park, where a bench under a tree provides respite from the heat, the customer buying a cigarette from a roadside tea stall is told to take a puff at his own risk. "The police are around, and they may fine you," says the shopkeeper.

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Similarly, in Jeppu, a crowd watches a policeman print out a slip for a man who had been caught smoking near a bus stop. Needless to say, the shopkeeper nearby had a word of caution for buyers.

After years of near-inactivity, the police have upped their action against those smoking in public places, or so it appears when one compares statistics.

Till October, the city police have booked 38 cases under the Karnataka Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Health of Non-Smokers Act, 2001, (popularly referred to as Smoking Act). Of these, four persons have challenged the fines in court.

This is clearly up from the 12 cases filed last year (with one in court) and a paltry five cases filed in 2011.

### COTPA

Apart from these, the police have also filed four cases each in the past three years under Section 4 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, which also prohibits smoking in public places. "In Smoking Act, we can issue a penalty on the spot, like a traffic offence; whereas, in COTPA, we have to file an FIR, which is cumbersome," said a police official.

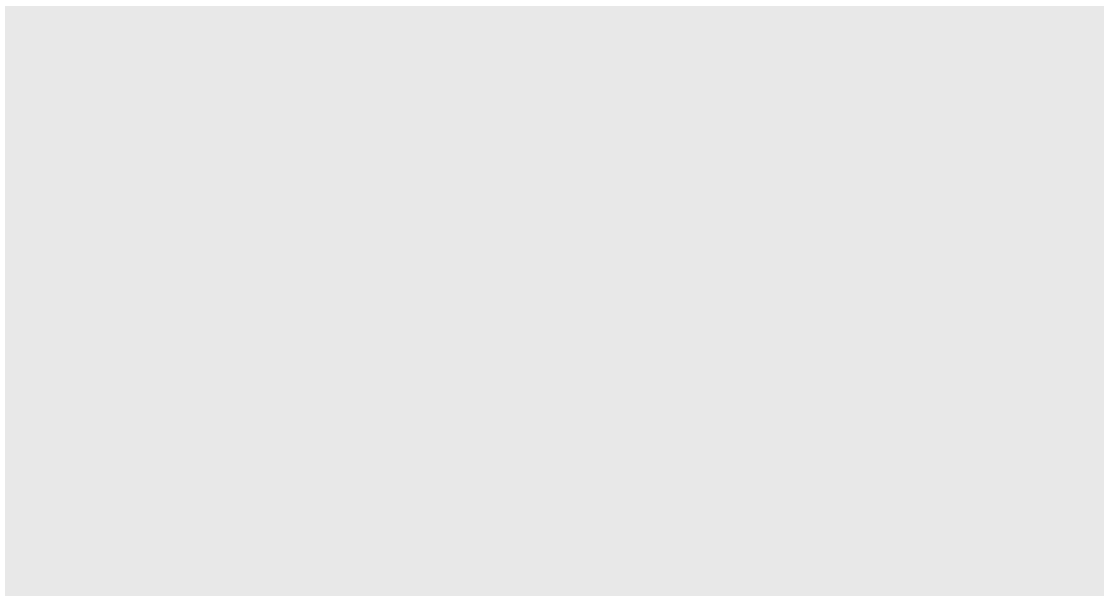
However, even a casual drive around the city will allow glimpses of hundreds smoking beedis or cigarettes near bus stands, outside make-shift tea stalls on busy pavements, or squatting by the shade in markets. The fear of public smoking does not seem to have set in, and the question arises: are a mere 38 cases enough?

For comparison, in the first three months of the year, Bangalore police booked 54 cases; while, in a three-day drive at August-end, the Manipal police had booked 140 cases.


Officials of the Tobacco Intervention Centre at A.J. Shetty Institute of Dental Sciences, which submitted a memorandum to the police asking for stricter action against public smokers, believe the present efforts were not sufficient.

### 'Control the epidemic'

"This is an epidemic that needs to be controlled," said Vijaya Hegde, co-ordinator at the centre. On the need to curb down on those smoking in public, she said: "Apart from benefits to society by curbing passive smoking, those who have quit are more likely to relapse if they see someone smoking." For their part, a senior police official said it was difficult to concentrate on just anti-smoking laws when they have to juggle numerous acts, IPC sections, crimes, bandobasts, crowd controls, and security details.



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