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# Tobacco-free zones: Govt to crack whip on schools

DHNS

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The State government has finally decided to crack down on the sale of tobacco products in the vicinity of educational institutions, especially schools.

Following several orders from the Supreme Court and the High Court of Karnataka for the prosecution of educational institutions which do not comply with Section 6 of the Control of Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, prohibiting sale of tobacco products within 100 yards of such institutions, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), has set up a mechanism to implement the ban.

One of the major actions under the mechanism is generation of a monthly report on implementation of the COTPA's rules, like display of tobacco prohibition boards, ensuring ban on sales, and also conducting awareness programmes in classrooms.

A senior official from the DPI told Deccan Herald that the block education officers (BEOs) have been directed to visit schools in their jurisdiction to check on the implementation of the COTPA rules, and send monthly updated reports to the respective Deputy Directors of Public Instruction (DDPIs) in different educational districts.

The DDPIs will forward the reports to the head office and the department will pass them on to the State government. "To make the process of reporting faster and easy to update, we have developed an online system," he said.

The first such report (for September) generated by the DPI on COTPA implementation around schools is in possession of Deccan Herald and statistics reveal that the State has a long way to go in safeguarding children from the cloud of cigarettes, gutka and other tobacco products.

While the BEOs across the 34 educational districts have visited 18,198 schools, they have found only 12,348 schools displaying tobacco prohibition boards.

"As many as 5,850 schools are yet to comply with the COTPA rules. However, the reporting is just a beginning and we have instructed defaulters about severe action if the COTPA's rules are not implemented. In the coming months, we will visit more schools and within a few months, the situation is expected to improve," he said.

The sale of tobacco products to minors is in violation of COTPA 2003. While Section 4 of COTPA prohibits smoking in public places, Section 6 prohibits the sale of tobacco products to minors, within 100 yards of an educational institution.

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