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## Tobacco smoke pollution

A research study, jointly carried out by the National Alliance for Tobacco Control (NATC) and the Aga Khan University, has found that the tobacco smoke pollution level in Pakistani hotels and restaurants is ten times higher than the WHO permissible limit. Based on a survey of 40 hotels and restaurants in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, the study discovered that the overall tobacco smoke pollution level was as high as 1800 microgram per square meter, whereas the safe limit is less than 15 microgram per square meter. The situation is particularly bad in 'Shisha' bars - a recent implant from the Middle East. Considering that these bars are frequented by young people, this is a serious cause of concern.

The hazards of smoking as well, as inhaling second hand smoke, are well-known. Which is why most developed countries have banned smoking in public places, including airports, offices, restaurants, and even hotel rooms. It is not unusual for those living in shared buildings, such as flats, to face the restriction within the privacy of a home as well. People can smoke either on roadsides or, in the case of hotels and airports, in specially designated spots. As a consequence, not only indoor air remains clean, smokers get

discouraged, too. It, in fact, is a much more effective way of keeping people away from smoking than morbid warnings inscribed on cigarette packs.

Back in 2003, the Pakistan government also announced a ban on smoking in public places. Unfortunately, no one seems to have taken it seriously. One reason for this is a lack of public awareness about the danger of inhaling second-hand smoke, and another general tendency among the more privileged classes to mix display of power with flouting of the law. The government needs to take a serious notice of the situation, and intervene to implement the ban. That would require, at least, three steps. First, the provincial health departments need to run periodic awareness campaigns so that people know it is an offence to light up in a public place. Second, all restaurants, hotels, offices and other public places must display no-smoking signs. Third, the relevant authorities must keep a strict watch on violators, and punish them according to the law. Last but not least, civil society organizations, such as NATC, need to maintain a sustained pressure on the government to ensure that the ban is fully observed.