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Our correspondent Islamabad

With finances being provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Tobacco Control Cell of the Ministry of Health has produced a 15-minute culturally-relevant documentary that draws attention to tobacco control laws and their effective enforcement in Pakistan. This is the first effort of its kind in the country.

"The film not only deals with the health hazards of smoking and second-hand tobacco smoke, but is also a way of reaching out to law enforcement agencies and other categories of citizens, who have been certified by the law, as 'authorized persons', who are empowered to take action against violators. It will help to increase their knowledge about their legal roles and responsibilities and contribute to more effective enforcement of tobacco control laws all across the country," TCC Director-General Yusuf Khan informed 'The News' here on Saturday.

The video is of 15-minute duration but has a shorter 5-minute version accompanying it. It is good to see that six versions are available on one DVD in Urdu, Sindhi and Pushto.

The video begins by explaining how smoking can cause 18 types of cancer, heart disease, lung diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and tuberculosis. It then goes on to describe to the viewer, how second-hand tobacco smoke needs to be taken very seriously since according to WHO, secondhand-tobacco smoke is as damaging as smok-

Pakistan produces first-ever video on tobacco control laws



ing itself. The video appeals to non-smokers to take the initiative to protect their own right of breathing clean air in homes, workplaces and public transport and not to suffer in silence!

Another aspect that this documentary touches is smoking among the youth, 'sheeha,' and the prohibition of sale of tobacco products to youth.

Since the video aims at

reaching out to persons like restaurant managers, bus drivers, school principals, police officers, hospital administrators, railway guards, bus and wagon conductors, shopkeepers, etc. who are 'authorised persons' under the law, the language has been kept very simple and the sections of law have been explained in simple language.

Responding to a question, Yusuf Khan shared that the

video will be disseminated all over the country, particularly through cable networks. It will also be used in forthcoming training sessions that will be conducted in the districts that have recently been brought on board. "We are grateful to WHO for providing us the funding to make this video," he expressed.

It may be recollected that on May 30, 2010, on the occasion of World No-Tobacco

Day, Minister for Health Makhdoom Shahabuddin had announced that for the coming few years, the focus of tobacco control activities would rest on effective enforcement of the existing tobacco control laws.

The Ministry of Health concedes to the fact that the implementation of the Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers' Health Ordinance, which was promulgated in 2002, remains patchy across the country. Implementation of certain sections of the law has been good, particularly with regard to Section-7, which deals with Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship. The fact that tobacco products are not openly advertised in the print and electronic media in Pakistan is evidence of successful enforcement efforts. Sports events and awards sponsored by known cigarette brands are a thing of the past. However, other areas covered by this law, like prohibition of smoking in places of public work or use and public transport, prohibition of sales of tobacco products to persons under the age of 18 years, suffer from weak enforcement.

The documentary is expected to help remedy the situation in a more effective manner. The provincial and district governments now have a tool that can be utilized for effective enforcement of tobacco control laws, creation of public awareness with regard to the hazards of smoking and second-hand tobacco smoke, and propagation of the role of members of the public and officials.