

Smoking ban smokescreen

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Subject: Smoking ban

I don't have time to be for or against the new smoking ban. I have other worries: who is going to bring my empty beer glass back to the bar and who is going to empty my ashtray?

I am one of the owners/directors of Sugar Factory and in preparation for the ban we decided to build a smoking lounge. We even had the luck to receive a building permit in time. But we're still struggling with the above question. The new law states that no employees can work in the smoking lounge. Very well, the government has finally decided to protect the employees—against themselves. So when, for example, Martijn the bartender wants to smoke a cigarette during his shift, he has to step from behind the bar. But while smoking in the lounge, he notices that it's full of empty glasses and overflowing ashtrays, there's nothing he can do about it. He is at work and therefore legally prohibited from touching the dirt. But get this: if the same Martijn comes to Sugar Factory on his day off, he is free to roam and pick up as many glasses as he wants. He can even lick the ashtrays clean and no one can do anything about it since at that moment he is a visitor and visitors are not (yet) legally protected against themselves.

Well, I think Martijn is lucky because he still has a choice. He can be an employee one day, a visitor the next. He can work on his day off and be prevented from working during his shift. I am not that lucky. I am employed as a director so I am always at work when in the premises. Legally, I can even be fined for bringing my own empty beer glass back from the smoking lounge to the bar or for emptying my ashtray. Well, you might say, how about asking Martijn who just happens to be in the smoking lounge on his day off? Well, I will answer, I am not allowed to ask my employees to perform any tasks in the smoking lounge, that's what the law says, remember? And for me Martijn is always an employee, regardless whether he's on shift or off. Perhaps, I could try to hypnotise Martijn to pick up my empty glass—no asking involved there. But sadly I don't possess that necessary talent.

I also lack the necessary talents for understanding many other inconsistencies in regards to the smoking ban. For example, marijuana. Legally, I can not do anything about a visitor smoking a pure marijuana joint since it does not fall under the ban. Reading the guidelines from the Ministry of Health doesn't make me any wiser. And trying to get more details on the local governmental level is equally futile. I guess I will still be stuck for a while in my own smoking lounge, with a handful of unanswered questions and empty beer glasses.

But how about if I asked that pretty brunette standing next to me? She is just a visitor. Perhaps while offering her a cigarette I will whisper in a deep voice: 'Sweetie, would you mind bringing my glass back to the bar?' How about that for an opening line! You know, I might just try.