



A smoke free Europe? MEPs weigh in on restricting tobacco use

Wide-ranging restrictions on smoking in public places and rules to make it harder for underage people to buy cigarettes were among the measures proposed by the Environment Committee in a report adopted on Wednesday.

The own-initiative report, drafted by Karl-Heinz Florenz (EPP-ED, DE) in response to a Commission consultation paper, says that 650,000 people a year die from smoking, including 80,000 from passive smoking, with children and unborn babies being particularly vulnerable. While 70% of Europeans are non-smokers, 86% are in favour of a ban on smoking at work, 84% in other public places, 61% in bars and pubs and 77% in restaurants, notes the committee.

MEPs therefore welcome the Commission's Green Paper "Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level" but regard it only as a starting point. They urge the Commission to designate environmental tobacco smoke a class 1 carcinogen and call on Member States to introduce, within 2 years, an unrestricted smoking ban in all enclosed workplaces, including catering establishments, as well as in all enclosed public buildings and transport. The Commission is asked to produce a report on the cost incurred to national health systems and the EU economy as a result of smoking and tobacco smoke.

Toughen existing rules, say MEPs

The Environment Committee believes an existing directive, from 2001, on tobacco products should be updated to toughen the rules on tobacco additives, including those which are carcinogenic or addiction-enhancing. The report also insists that the same directive include "a renewed library of larger, hard-hitting picture warnings", to be made mandatory "on all tobacco products sold in the European Union".

The report asks the Commission to examine measures such as introducing an EU-wide ban on the sale of tobacco products to people under 18 years of age, allowing cigarette machines to be placed only where they are inaccessible to young people, removing tobacco products from self-service displays in retail outlets and banning distance sales of tobacco products to young people (e.g. over the internet). In the same breath, the committee calls on Member States to commit themselves "to reduce smoking among youth by at least 50% by 2025."

Directing their attention to their own workplace, MEPs in the committee call for Parliament - "in the light of its duty to set an example" - to adopt a smoking ban "with no exemptions" in all areas of the House.

N.B. :

Procedure: own-initiative report; Plenary vote: October 11, Strasbourg

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