

Adapted from an article on the BBCi Business website, January 2004. Permission given.

Second-hand smoke threat issued

A campaigning anti-smoking charity is warning UK bosses that they now face legal action if they fail to protect their workers from tobacco smoke.

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) says that all employers should now be well aware of the health threat posed by smoke.

The charity is campaigning for bars, clubs and restaurants to be made smoke-free zones to protect staff. Restaurants and hotels are against a complete ban, saying they are already improving air quality in pubs and bars.



ASH says that any employer not taking steps to protect staff are vulnerable to court action under the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Legal threats

ASH has teamed up with a firm of personal injury lawyers. At Thompsons, the legal firm involved working with ASH, John Hall said: "Bosses are no more entitled to allow smoke in the workplace as they are to allow asbestos or coal dust. They need to give the order to stub out or they will face the growing threat of legal action."

However, a total ban on smoking in pubs and restaurants may not enjoy widespread support. According to a survey published last year, only 17% of those questioned thought there should be a total ban on smoking in pubs, clubs and bars.

Although 75% believe further improvements are necessary, 61% agreed that pubs, clubs and bars are noticeably less smoky than they were.

The time is long past when employers should have known that second-hand smoke is bad for their staff, and bad for the general public.

Deborah Arnott, ASH

Last year representatives from all 13 Royal Colleges of Medicine called for a ban on smoking in public places, saying the move could save 150,000 lives. It is estimated in some surveys that eight million non-smokers were exposed to smoke in their workplaces.

QUESTIONS:

1. Outline the main features of the Health and Safety at Work Act.
2. What does ASH want to see happen in the hotel and restaurant trade?
3. Why do you think bars and restaurants are against this?
4. Do you think staff working in bars and hotels should be better protected? Why?
5. As a Human Resources consultant, put forward arguments for and against a total ban. What would be your conclusion?