

# Health Ministry fails to protect non-smokers

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ISLAMABAD - Ministry of Health is yet to awake from deep slumber as the open violation of the advertising guidelines of Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers' Health Ordinance 2002 goes unchecked in the twin cities.

Health managers remained unable to go for the complete enforcement of the advertising guidelines of the relevant law in Islamabad and Rawalpindi because of inadequate implementation mechanism adopted by them.

Despite the government's ban on tobacco advertisements on electronic and print media the other forms of advertisements adopted by this industry, i.e. poster, sponsorships and attractive gift schemes continues attracting youth.

It has also been observed that large-sized posters of popular cigarettes brands are pasted on walls, bookshops and general stores within the range of 50 metres of many educational institutes of twin cities which is in violation of the law that clearly prohibits advertisements of tobacco products within 50 metres of any educational body.

Open sale of cigarettes in the huts established near Quaid-i-Azam University, stores decorated with large size posters of popular

brands outside Hamdarad University Islamabad campus and Gordon College Rawalpindi are few examples of the violation. These posters carrying attractive offers of gifts for smokers were meant to lure the youth studying in these educational institutes.

Apart from the lenient attitude of health managers towards the tobacco industry the business interests and the vigorous promotional campaigns of tobacco industry are also proving the stumbling blocks in the way of effective implementation of the tobacco law.

An NGO "TheNetwork for Consumer Protection" is pursuing the issue with the health ministry.

Waqar Ahmed, Chief Executive Officer, TheNetwork while talking to TheNation asked how the health managers could persuade the tobacco industry for complete implementation of tobacco advertising guidelines when senior health officials seek assistance from tobacco industry in emergency and relief work of government.

"Officials in Ministry of Health demonstrated this unethical practice especially in case of rehabilitation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). All this has resulted in giving free hand to the tobacco industry, which has now openly started violating the said ordinance," he said.