

Some MPs called for the smoking prohibition to apply to smokers' homes in Parliament on Monday, but Senior Minister of State for Health Amy Khor said that the Government did not want to intrude into people's homes on this issue. ST FILE PHOTO



Grouses over cigarette smoke drifting into homes falling

NEA says cases nearly halved over 5 years to 270 last year, even as MPs call for stiffer laws

Jose Hong

The number of complaints about cigarette smoke drifting into residential homes dropped by almost half over five years, according to figures revealed by the National Environment Agency (NEA).

Responding to The Straits Times' queries, an NEA spokesman said yesterday that the agency received about 270 such complaints last year, compared with around 500 in 2013.

The issue was back in the public spotlight on Monday as Members of Parliament debated and passed changes to the Smoking (Prohibition in Certain Places) Act.

Some of them, like Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Joan Pereira and Nee Soon GRC MP Lee Bee Wah, called for the law to apply to smokers' homes, while Senior Minister of State for Health Amy Khor said that the Government did not want to intrude into people's homes on this issue.

Ms Pereira wanted in Parliament to make it illegal for second-hand smoke to drift out of a person's home and, in further comments to The

Straits Times yesterday, said she receives complaints on the subject around twice monthly. "Many of the complaints that I receive are from

FEELING THE SQUEEZE

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HEAVY SMOKER EDDIE NG 52

BEING CONSIDERATE

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NON-SMOKER LESTER LAI 25, who said cigarette smoke from his neighbour downstairs drifts into his room daily.

households with people who are more vulnerable to the health effects of second-hand smoke," she said.

"While I recognise that smokers have their right to smoke and their right to do so in their homes, we also must all be considerate and tolerant of each other. Their neighbours also wish to have a smoke-free and healthy environment to live in, especially the elderly or those with children and those who may have respiratory problems."

Sociology professor Paulin Straughan said that the public pays attention to the issue of smoking in residential areas because of how closely people live together, and because of the Government's strong anti-smoking drive. She said, however, that it is a complex situation, and different policies need to apply to different types of smokers.

Smoking is already forbidden in common living spaces such as corridors and lift lobbies.

"We need to understand why a young person would pick up smoking... There is a group of smokers who are generally from a lower socio-economic class and, because of circumstance and the social environment they're in, smoking is the norm," said the Singapore Management University professor.

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Recourse for smoking disputes at mediation centre

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ment University dean of students.

Prof Straughan said there must be effective alternatives and education in place for these people, so that they can effectively stop.

In her closing speech in Parliament on Monday, Dr Khor said residents who cannot resolve smoking disputes with their neighbours can go to the Community Mediation Centre (CMC) in Tanjong Pagar.

A Law Ministry spokesman said CMC received 12 cases of disputes among neighbours involving cigarette smoke in the first six months of the year. Only in one of the cases did the applicants agree to move to the mediation stage. The dispute was resolved successfully.

Marketing manager Eddie Ng is a heavy smoker who has watched the public discussion with discomfort.

He believes smokers themselves should be more aware of whether their neighbours are home and, if they are, smoke less. But the 52-year-old does not support a smoking ban that affects a person within his own home. "The spaces we have for smoking are getting smaller and smaller. Now, it's like we must hide ourselves."

But non-smoker Lester Lai, 25, said he supports a ban. He said cigarette smoke from his downstairs neighbour drifts into his room daily.

"It's the same idea as not blasting your music late at night because it disturbs other neighbours," said the research assistant. "It's all about common courtesy and thinking about the people around you."

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