

From point reduction to termination, UAE firms mull disciplinary actions against smokers

Private companies share plans to be tobacco-free workplaces in line with MoHAP guidelines

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Many public places and offices already have signboards and systems in place to disallow smoking in the UAE.

Image Credit: Gulf News archives

Dubai: The UAE health ministry's recent move to issue tobacco-free workplace guidelines to government departments and private companies has prompted various firms to revise their policies and ensure compliance.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP) on June 10 issued a guidebook that seeks to establish tobacco-free workplaces across the country. In tobacco-free workplaces, smoking is not allowed anywhere in the organisation, including outdoor areas and parking areas or vehicles.

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In case of deliberate violation of the smoking prohibition procedures within the facility while being aware of them, disciplinary actions must be taken against the violating party.

While they still await more clarity on whether the guidelines are mandatory for all and what kind of disciplinary actions can be taken against employees violating the new no-smoking policy, companies that spoke to Gulf News said they were gearing up to implement a blanket ban on smoking on their premises.

According to the UAE health ministry's guidebook, disciplinary actions must be taken against employees violating the facility's smoking prohibition procedures."

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HR and admin managers and other senior executives across different sectors also shared what disciplinary actions they think could be taken against violators.

Several companies said they had already implemented a strict no-smoking policy inside their buildings, but have designated smoking areas outside the offices.

Smoke-free platform

Eddie Manalo Jr., business development manager with an audio visual solution provider, said: "Our office implemented strict no-smoking policies inside the building to protect the health of our employees and reduce the risk of fire.

"Hence, we consider our office as a smoke-free platform valuing the sustainable health of our team. But, we have a small designated smoking area in the building's parking."



Eddie Manalo Jr

Birgit Gross, country HR manager, of an energy major, said her company had been promoting a tobacco-free workplace for many years.



Birgit Gross

“In all our facilities and sites, we only allow smoking outside and distant from our building facilities in designated areas.

“We do follow a disciplinary process ensuring the safety and health of our employees. We build constant awareness on restricted behaviours in the workplace, such as smoking, and communicate our policies.”

Revising policies

Sandesh Divagar, corporate sales manager with an education and smart classroom solution provider, said: “Smoking is generally discouraged within our office premises. Employees who do smoke are asked to be considerate of others and not to smoke within office surroundings. We understand the importance of adhering to best practices and providing a safe and healthy work environment for all employees. Therefore, we are actively reviewing the new recommendations regarding designated smoking areas.”

Though it is still not clear if the new guidelines are mandatory, Divagar said his company was “seriously considering implementing these recommendations to align with industry standards and promote employee well-being.”

Betzy Varghese, HR and admin manager at a freight management company in Dubai, said her firm was also planning to go totally smoke-free as per the new guidelines.



Sandesh Divagar



Betzy Varghese

“We have allocated smoking zones, but employees are only allowed to use them during the lunch break. We also have a diet plan and gym session for employees’ health and welfare. We counsel them individually about quitting smoking too, but we are not always successful. We are planning to include an additional segment of counseling during our medical screening programmes to offer support to quit smoking.”

Meanwhile, Manar Elkholy, HR manager of a beauty and cosmetics trading group, said her company does not support smoking in any form on its premises, aligning with its commitment to sustainability and a healthy workplace.

“Having previously implemented a no-smoking policy, I am now working on developing a new smoking policy for our organisation that promotes a cleaner, healthier environment for all as we strive to create a workplace that is both healthy and environmentally friendly.”



Manar Elkholy

Assisting smokers to quit

Jessie Joy, senior HR and admin manager at a digital marketing company in Abu Dhabi, said her company would assist staff members who want to stop smoking.



Jessie Joy

“We will provide resources such as counselling services, nicotine replacement medications, and smoking cessation programmes. All staff members will get clear communication about this new policy via emails, meetings, and other office communication channels. Our dedication lies in providing assistance to every worker throughout this shift and cultivating a cooperative and hygienic workplace. All staff members will receive frequent training sessions and educational materials to make sure they are completely aware of the company’s no-smoking policy and the repercussions for breaking it.”

Tackling violators

According to the ministry’s guidebook, disciplinary actions must be taken against employees violating the facility’s smoking prohibition procedures.

If the violators are visitors, and if they do not leave the building even after a warning, actions normally taken by the facility in respect of illegal behaviours must apply.

Joy said employees who violate policies will receive written and verbal warnings, as well as support services such as counseling and access to smoking cessation programmes during the disciplinary process.

Gross said any violation at her company would follow a defined disciplinary action protocol which could range from issuing a verbal and written warning and leading to further sanctions where necessary.

Divagar said his company takes policy violations seriously. “Employees who disregard the guidelines regarding smoking, such as smoking in unauthorised areas or creating a disruptive environment for others, may be subject to disciplinary action. These actions could include verbal warnings, written reprimands, temporary suspension, or, in severe or repeated cases, termination of employment.”

Meanwhile, Varghese said: “We have a rewards system for employees, and one form of disciplinary action can be deducting points in the reward scheme. We could think of keeping a smoking penalty box and use the fines collected for some charity or welfare activities. We can even reward whistleblowers who report smokers violating the rules.”

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