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Many non-smokers fearful or shy about objecting to illegal smoking

• By JUDY SIEGEL

Most non-smokers who object to smoking in public places just move away from those violating the law instead of protesting and demanding their right to clean air, according to a survey issued by the Israel Cancer Association (ICA) to mark World No Smoking Day on May 31.

The representative sample of 786 adults found that 50 percent move elsewhere when encountering smokers in public places, while only 13% said they object verbally and 23% said it "doesn't bother them." None of the respondents said they take photos with their cellphone of the violators or file a complaint with the authorities.

The Health Ministry did not issue the annual Smoking Report by press time Monday, even though it is required by law to be prepared and

presented to the Knesset speaker (and sent to the media) on May 31. Health Minister MK Ya'acov Litzman will not hold the traditional press conference on smoking that has accompanied the handover of the report, reportedly because there has been no decline in smoking here since the last report.

Meanwhile, the Israel Defense Forces – with help from the ICA, the Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical Faculty and the Health Ministry – has launched a new program to help soldiers to kick their smoking habit using cellphones. Text messages suited to male and female soldiers will be sent to participants at no cost. It has been true for years that many soldiers learn to start smoking when they enlist,

and by the time they hang up their uniforms at the end of their service, many of them are hooked. The phone messages with by dynamic and ask the participant to set a date by which he or she wants to be smoke free. People can register through a section of the ICA website at bit.ly/startsms2quit.

The program was initiated by Dr. Haggai Levine of the HU-Hadassah School of Public Health and Community Medicine who is also an ICA adviser. Levine found that the program is acceptable by Israeli smokers an that 30% of civilians who participants in the past gave up smoking during a three-month followup period.

In addition, at the initiative of the Center for Local Authorities' Healthy Cities Network and the ICA, a program to raise awareness of the harm of smoking will be launched. There will be a No Smoking Day in the Knesset on June 14, with a Knesset plenary session and committee meetings. An annual school competition of designing no-smoking posters will also be held.

Nevertheless, in the field of smoking prevention legislation and enforcing the laws, the Knesset and the Health Ministry have been very weak, leaving unimplemented numerous sections of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to which Israel is a signatory. These include closing down smoking rooms, barring duty-free tobacco at the airports and requiring cigarette packs to be sold in plain packaging.



(Israel Cancer Association)