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HDHHS issues first restaurant smoking ban citation

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) has issued the first citation under the city's new ordinance banning smoking in restaurants.

The restaurant allowed smoking in its dining area after the ban went into effect Sept. 5, but is now in compliance. It faces a potential fine of up to \$2,000.

"Restaurants must adhere to the new ordinance and respect the rights of their non-smoking customers in their dining areas or they will have to deal with the consequences," said Mayor Bill White.

HDHHS has received 22 complaints related to smoking in eating establishments since the ordinance took effect. Under the ordinance, restaurant managers must ask people in dining areas to extinguish burning tobacco products.

Restaurants can still allow smoking in indoor bars as long as they are immediately adjacent to an exhaust system or otherwise ventilated so that smoke is not drawn into or across non-smoking areas. A restaurant must post clearly visible signs to inform customers if it permits smoking in its bar and provide ashtrays in the smoking area.

Smoking is also still permitted in outdoor dining areas.

The ordinance also prohibits smoking in covered or enclosed public ground transportation facilities.

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People can e-mail complaints to HDHHS at smoke.health@cityofhouston.net or fax them to 713-640-4342. For more information about the ordinance, visit www.houstonhealth.org or call 713-640-4359.

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