



Dirty coffee shops, bigger fines: NEA

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A DIRTY coffee shop toilet is as Singaporean as chicken rice.

When was the last time you stepped into the toilet to find it dry, smelling of roses and stocked with toilet paper?

From next month, if the coffee shop operator fails to keep the toilet clean or provide items like toilet paper, soap or liquid detergent, he will be in trouble.

It's a major offence and will attract a \$300 fine.

The Government is taking tougher action against the owners. Clean up your act, and toilet, or face the brunt of the law.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) told The New Paper that they plan to give operators additional incentives to keep the common areas of their premises, like toilets and refreshment areas, clean.

Last year, NEA stepped up enforcement against dirty toilets at coffee shops.

The result? From 140 cases in 2007, and 170 in 2008, 474 operators of premises like coffee shops, restaurants and foodcourts were taken to task last year for dirty toilets.

Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, announced a series of measures in Parliament yesterday.

Starting April, NEA will raise the minimum fine for food hygiene offences from the current \$100, to between \$200 and \$400, depending on the severity of the offence.

A new demerit point system will be introduced for main operators of coffee shops, foodcourts and canteens, as well as more inspectors and frequent inspections.

That's to keep the cleanliness of almost 27,000 private food establishments and hawker centres in Singapore in check.

Dr Yaacob said Singapore has a low annual number

of food poisoning outbreaks, with an average of four incidents per 1,000 food retail outlets between 2006 and 2009.

But he said the food hygiene regime must continue to be strengthened.

The new measures include a Points Demerit System (PDS), being introduced by NEA, for the main licensees of canteens, coffee shops and foodcourts.

Those who chalk up 24 demerit points for cleanliness-related offences within 12 months will be required to close shop for up to three days to carry out thorough cleaning.

The PDS will be implemented by the end of this year.

More careful now

Coffee shop operator Kenneth Lee, 48, manager of Hai Fong Restaurant in Toa Payoh, said of the new measure: "We will be more careful now because it will be very bad if we have to close. People will not want to patronise us if they will think the coffee shop is dirty. It will be very bad for business."

He claimed his coffee shop has not been fined in its 27 years of business.

Single-operator food establishments, such as individual food stalls in a coffee shop or a restaurant, are already covered under the current PDS, where getting 12 demerit points within 12 months will lead to a suspension of licence for two weeks.

Dr Yaacob also said his ministry has taken a "serious view" of the administrative lapses involving the delays in the grading of food stalls, which surfaced following the Geylang Serai food poisoning incident last April, which left two women dead and 152 ill.

He said NEA has since tightened its internal system to ensure that grading is done in a timely manner and there are no delays in the issuing of grading decals.

NEA's management has also reprimanded officers responsible for not carrying out the gradings on time.

- Additional reporting by **Woo Sian Boon, newsroom intern**