

# Heavier penalties for litterbugs

■ BY JERMYN CHOW

LITTERBUGS will have to pay heavier fines in a move by the Government to curb the problem.

From April 1, first-time offenders will pay \$300 - or \$100 more - for failing to dispose of small items such as cigarette butts, car parking coupon tabs and sweet wrappers in litter bins.

Those who do it again will also face harsher penalties. Besides having to pick up rubbish in public under a Corrective Work Order (CWO), they could also face fines of up to \$5,000.

The harsher penalties, revised for the first time in 10 years, are part of the National Environment Agency's (NEA) drive to maintain public cleanliness in Singapore, including at hawker centres and in public toilets.

The littering problem in Singapore has worsened. A record 33,164 litterbugs were caught last year, eight times the 3,800-plus nabbed in 2005. Many were young men.

About 94 per cent of litterbugs are smokers who drop their cigarette butts. About 80 per cent were men, with more than half under 30 years old.

Acknowledging that Singapore has yet to overcome this anti-social behaviour, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Yaacob Ibrahim said penalties "must act as effective deterrents".

He was responding to calls by Mr Charles Chong (Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC) and Mr Ong Kian Min (Tampines GRC) to step up efforts to combat the littering scourge.

Dr Yaacob said the NEA would review the need to beef up punitive measures to arrest the problem.

Besides the new fines, enforcement officers will continue to target littering hot spots, such as shopping belts, bus stops and parks in areas like Geylang, Little India and Chinatown.

Beyond the punishments, Dr Yaacob urged people to do their part to keep Singapore clean.

The NEA will launch a new national cleanliness campaign in the middle of this year, via the grassroots, schools and businesses to promote the habit of keeping places clean.

Mr Howard Shaw, executive director of the Singapore Environment Council, said the move to raise penalties was "unfortunate, but necessary".

"Public shaming via the CWO has not stopped more people from littering, so we have to hit them where it hurts most - their pockets."

Mr Shaw added that a public campaign was essential to change people's attitudes and behaviour.

NEA will also continue to improve hawker centres and public toilets.

To date, 71 food centres have been upgraded. Eight are now getting a facelift, with 32 more in the pipeline.

Dr Yaacob said this would ensure hawker centres continued to provide a clean, hygienic and pleasant dining environment.

In his reply to a call from Madam Ho Geok Choo (West Coast GRC) to look into hawker hygiene, he said 86 per cent of 5,000 or so cooked food stalls

here received a B grading last year, up from just 46 per cent in 2002.

Those who flout hygiene rules receive demerit points, while repeat offenders can have their licences suspended or revoked.

Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Environment and Water Resources) Amy Khor also outlined how NEA will continue to police public hygiene and cleanliness with a strict licensing regime for food outlets and supporting a nationwide drive to have clean public toilets.

She said NEA would continue its partnership with The Straits Times and the Singapore Kindness Movement in the Goodness Gracious Me! project to get customers to return their trays after meals. She said the four-month-old campaign would be rolled out to more hawker centres later this year.

## ■ LITTERBUGS ON THE RISE

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total offenders caught	3,819	7,027	21,269	33,164
First-time offenders who throw "minor" litter such as cigarette butts and bus tickets	3,692	6,905	20,736	32,001
First-time offenders throwing "serious" litter such as drink cans and tissue paper	64	58	148	236
Repeat offenders	63	64	385	927
Corrective Work Order (CWO) cases	127	122	533	1,163

Source: National Environment Agency (NEA)

ST GRAPHICS