

Clifton fines eateries for indoor smoking

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BY ADAM GREENBERG

STAFF WRITER

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CLIFTON – In what has become a growing problem for the [Clifton](#) Health Department, the list of eateries and bars that are fined for allowing smoking indoors – notably hookah smoking – continues to grow.

The Sultan Restaurant is the most recent to be fined after city officials observed hookah smoking inside the restaurant last week. [Clifton](#) Health Inspector Tony Sanchez issued a fine to the Middle Eastern-themed Sultan Restaurant on Crooks Avenue – bringing its penalty total to \$6,198.

Sultan Restaurant is not the only City eatery that has been fined by the [Clifton](#) Health Department for smoking indoors despite state laws – predominately the New Jersey Smoke Free Air Act of 2006 – mandating otherwise.

Among the biggest offenders are the Middle Eastern-themed Beirut Restaurant on Main Avenue, which has been fined more than \$11,000 for allowing hookah smoking indoors, and Al-Jannah Restaurant on Main Avenue, also a Middle Eastern-themed eatery, which was fined more than \$4,000 for also allowing hookah smoking indoors.

Inexpensive costs make hookah a profitable business for restaurants, which typically charge between \$15 and \$25 per roughly hour-long hookah sessions. It is not just the Middle Eastern-themed restaurants adding it to the menu; La Oficina Bar and Grill Restaurant on Lexington Avenue was recently hit with a \$250 fine for allowing hookah smoking indoors.

Clifton Health Officer John Biegel said it is New Jersey state law that any business in smoking violation be issued a notice on first offense, a \$250 fine on second offense, a \$500 fine on third offense and a \$1,000 fine for every subsequent offense. Additional costs are for court fees.

The fee-paying process is time-consuming, Biegel explained, and each fine issued ends up stacking if the establishment has not yet paid previous penalties. Sultan Restaurant has been in violation numerous times recently, said Biegel, which is why the fine is more than \$6,000.

Made popular in the Middle East and Asia, a hookah is a tall and narrow glass device with a chamber on top for a myriad of tobaccos, including cherry, watermelon and apple mint. Burning coals placed atop the tobacco help maintain a long, steady burn and smoke is inhaled through one or more hoses coming out of the device.

The social, tranquil and exotic aspect of hookah smoking has been all the rage over the past decade – particularly among young adults who enjoy the variety of tobacco flavors – which is why the illegal indoor smoking issue continues to be a problem. In some cultures, hookah is used to smoke marijuana and other drugs.

Health Educator Lori Ann DiRienzo was quick to buck a misconception that smoking hookah tobacco is healthier than smoking cigarettes, explaining it could be worse due to the number of smoke inhalations per session and the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide.

"There are places [not in Clifton] where communicable disease is being spread because of exchange of the pipe," said DiRienzo, pointing to tuberculosis as one example. DiRienzo added that legitimate hookah smoking establishments claim the hookah hoses go through the same sanitation process as any other dish or piece of cutlery.

Biegel said there are more than 450 licensed eating and drinking establishments throughout Clifton and each one is inspected at least

once a year, with subsequent inspections scheduled if necessary. The Clifton Health Department has issued 25 violations totaling nearly \$25,000 to businesses for indoor smoking, so far in 2013.

Many smoking violations followed up by the Clifton Health Department are based on complaints from residents or patrons, said Biegel, adding anonymity is respected.

Keeping it simple, Biegel said that no smoking of any kind is allowed legally indoors in Clifton – even newer electronic cigarettes that are said to emit a safer vapor. Biegel said smoking in outdoor sections of businesses is perfectly legal, so long as it is not an enclosed area and there is good airflow.

Some businesses, notably Atlantic City casinos, are exempt from the Smoke Free Air Act and in Clifton that includes Jamie's Cigar Bar and Restaurant on Bloomfield Avenue, Kamil's Restaurant on Main Avenue and La Ziza Restaurant and Lounge on Crooks Avenue.

The reason for these three exemptions is because those businesses were established prior to 2004 and more than 15 percent of their business comes from sale of tobacco products. Biegel said those establishments must annually prove the latter requirement.

With the Clifton Health Department cracking down hard on establishments that continue to allow smoking indoors, only time will tell if the cost of penalties will overshadow the cost of a roughly \$20 hookah rental per table. Furthermore, business may dwindle if the Clifton Health Department follows through on a consideration to issue notices to patrons who violate the no smoking indoors law.

Owners of restaurants found in violation were unwilling to speak or were unavailable to speak as of Clifton Journal's deadline.

Email: greenberg@northjersey.com

http://www.northjersey.com/news/213441391_Clifton_fines_eateries_for_indoor_smoking.html