

## LIVE RIGHT

*They are proposing to deny anyone born in, or after the year 2000, from buying and smoking cigarettes. The people from Towards Tobacco Free Singapore (TTFS) say this is an innovative but simple way to phase out smoking from social mores here. TIMOTHY GOH breaks it down*



# Make the young snub it

TNP PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: ARIFFIN JAMAR

## Why it should work

The group reckons that passing a law like this will eliminate the “cool” factor from smoking.

According to Professor Jon Berrick, who teaches at Yale-NUS College, smoking has become a rite of passage.

“Currently, you’re sending the message that this product is too dangerous for kids under 18, but it’s okay if you’re a grown-up.”

He reckons that with a generation that will never have access to nicotine, people may one day say “smoking is old-fashioned”.

## Intuitively, it seems to mean that someone will lose their rights to choose their own actions.

The group’s stance is that it does not infringe on anyone’s rights, because it is not a right to choose to harm anyone else — and smoking does harm families, and those around the smokers.

Singapore has also banned harmful addictive substances such as heroin and cocaine, so tobacco should be banned too, adds Dr Koong Heng Nung, who works with the national care centre and is a founding member of the group.

“Nicotine is a drug that makes its users so addicted that they, in fact,

lose their right to freedom of choice by smoking.”

And the group says choosing to smoke also places a burden on taxpayers, whose dollar will go towards paying for health care when the smoker eventually becomes sick.

## Doesn’t that logic apply to fatty food and sugary drinks too?

“For something such as fatty food, there’s an element of pleasure in eating it, and human beings do need to eat food,” says Prof Berrick.

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people in Singapore die from smoking-related diseases each day.

Tobacco kills nearly

# 6 million each year.

■ Source: Singapore Health Promotion Board, World Health Organization.

On the other hand, there is no “safe” level of consumption for nicotine.

## The year 2000 line is arbitrary.

Absolutely. But the line has to be drawn somewhere, argues Dr Koong.

He points to how conscription was started in Singapore in 1967 but boys born one year before would have escaped it.

## Will it work here?

The group has yet to try to intro-

duce it as legislation here.

Dr Koong hopes that by introducing the concept to the public now, they will eventually approach their MPs to pass the proposal as legislation.

No government has implemented the proposal to date.

Dr Koong claims the TTFS proposal has inspired cancer specialists from 10 other countries in Asia to promote tobacco-free societies.

## The proposal calls for the measure to apply only to citizens and PRs. Would it make people envious of those who can smoke?

“The role of the government is first and foremost to protect locals. We have to start with our own people and hopefully, as the rest of the world considers and implements this proposal, it won’t be a problem.

“There’s nothing ‘fun’ to envy about smoking — lung cancer, heart attack... I wouldn’t envy that,” says Dr Koong.

## Will it create a black market?

Dr Koong says no. The plan is that while current smokers would still be allowed to smoke, the younger generation would be educated through programmes so that they do not even begin smoking.