

Workers make a fresh-air start with 2001 laws

2 January 2001, 20:10

By Jillian Green

People returning to closed working environments this week are finding they are entering a totally different atmosphere with the implementation of the new smoking legislation which came into effect on January 1.

And while there might be some small companies which have not made room for designated smoking areas, most major companies, such as Deloitte and Touche and Tongaat Hulett, have had smoke-free zones for years.

Most restaurant owners in the Durban area have said they will apply for temporary exemption, but others say they will still allow smoking in their establishments.

Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry CEO Jeya Wilson said the chamber had "surprisingly" not received any queries about the legislation.

"It is the first day back, but we do not foresee any problems. I think people will be wanting clarity on the legislation," she said.

According to Wilson, the chamber building itself has been a smoke-free zone since 1999.

"Most companies and corporations have had smoke-free zones prior to the legislation coming into effect."

The human resources administrator at Deloitte and Touche, Charmaine Barnard, said the firm had been smoke-free for the past four years.

"This is not a new thing to our employees," she said.

But the Sanlam offices in Durban have yet to implement any anti-smoking measures.

"We have not been informed of any changes as yet," said marketing consultant Gordon Govindsamy.

Meanwhile, Dave McGlew, an official at the KwaZulu-Natal department of health, said it was not the department's duty to make sure the legislation was implemented but rather the duty of the police.

However, according to reports, the police will not be treating the new legislation as a priority.

"There is no way we can be expected to enforce these smoking laws on a full-time basis when we have limited manpower and much more serious issues to deal with," Bala Naidoo said.

In Cape Town, the situation was much the same. A survey showed that big businesses were able to make a plan, but the small operator was going to feel the pinch.

Sun International, the owner of the Table Bay Hotel and the Goodwood casino, has applied for a three-month extension to make structural changes.

However, some hotels were quick to adapt their businesses to accommodate the law.

The Cape Grace, judged the best hotel in its class in November in the Conde Nast traveller's awards, is one example.

If a guest strolls into the hotel, cigarette in hand, he or she is tactfully directed to a new area, a malt whisky lounge.

The hotel's general manager, Richard Johnston, said: "The hotel also has a balcony outside, so of course they are also welcome to smoke there."

Metro Rail's marketing and communications manager, Riana Jacobs, said the average train journey took between 20 and 40 minutes, so it was not unreasonable to ask passengers to put out their cigarettes on the platform before they embarked and not light up again until they left the train.

But Metro Rail did not have enough staff to police this.

"It will be difficult to enforce. If someone is smoking, they will be politely asked to put their cigarette out. If they refuse, they'll be asked to leave the train."