

# No-smoking Movement Spreads

By Ato Ekusa

**T**he no-smoking movement is spreading around Japan like wildfire. At the top the Cabinet, which counts some heavy puffers in its ranks, agreed recently to push the ashtrays aside—at least for a brief spell. On May 29, Minister of Health and Welfare Tokuo Yamashita announced that his ministry would be turned into a no-smoking zone for a week in recognition of World No-Smoking Day, which fell on May 31, and he appealed to his Cabinet colleagues to refrain from smoking at meetings during the period.

Coming from the minister in charge of the nation's health, the plea could hardly be ignored. Minister of International Trade and Industry Kozo Watanabe, renowned for his chain-smoking, agreed to cooperate, albeit with reluctance. Chief Cabinet Secretary Koichi Kato, a non-smoker, thought it was a grand idea. And Minister for Foreign Affairs Michio Watanabe, a smoker, eventually gave in, acknowledging the fact that the wives of smokers have three times more likelihood of getting lung cancer than those of nonsmokers.

The Cabinet decision was only the tip of the iceberg. At the grass roots level, the movement has been picking up steam for some time. Tobacco lovers take special delight in an after-dinner puff, but the French restaurant Parisienne in Tokyo's Kichijoji declared a complete ban on smoking three years ago. Approximately 30% of the restaurant's customers, who average 2,000 a month, are smokers, but nonetheless business has continued as usual, with no complaints and no loss of patronage.

An increasing number of restaurants and hotels have been getting in on the act. Tokyo Kiba Hotel, which opened in March 1992 in Tokyo's Koto Ward, is completely smoke-free. The idea, which has gone down very well among guests, is that people should be able to enjoy their stay without worrying about the possibility of fires caused by smoking in bed—a

plague of hotel management—or smelly rooms. The hotel hands out nonsmoking pipes or candies, free of charge, to anyone who needs them. So far the hotel has caught two impatient guests smoking in the toilet and fined them ¥10,000 each—costly drags indeed.

The deluxe New Otani and Imperial hotels in Tokyo have adopted separatist policies, letting guests choose between no-smoking and smoking floors. Apparently, no-smoking rooms are filled up first.

## Smoke gets in ICs

The no-smoking movement has penetrated workplaces and staff rooms in schools, too. According to a survey by the Institute of Public Health, at junior high schools in which less than 40% of the teachers are smokers, the ratio of boys who have smoked is 25.4%. When the ratio of teacher smokers rises to between 40% and 49% the figure for boy pupils jumps to 28.4%, and above 50% the figure for boys is 30.4%. The moral seems to be that if teachers smoke, so do the kids.

Tobacco plays an important role in the journalist's image; the stereotype of the newspaper reporter is a person sitting over his manuscript, deep in thought, with a cigarette dangling between his fingers. A decade ago, eight out of 10 journalists were smokers. However, at a recent press conference at the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, attended by many veteran reporters, only two or three out of 23 press people were smoking. The smokers were easily outnumbered by young reporters who pushed away the ashtrays, complaining of the smell.

The no-smoking movement also has hit railway stations, where complete strangers congregate. Since the beginning of 1988 all the subway stations in Tokyo have been no-smoking areas, and smokers have reportedly kept their grumbles to themselves. And smoking

will be banned at all the 29 stations along the Yamanote loop line in Tokyo from August, though not so much because of health considerations as from a mountain of complaints from jostled rush-hour commuters that their clothes, or even their bodies, have suffered burns in the congestion.

One of the reasons why the no-smoking campaign has gathered so much momentum is the proliferation of sensitive computers. A little smoke in their integrated circuits, and these machines soon conk out. A statistics office at the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo) banned smoking in April. During the spring labor offensive last year the office's four personal computers had to take in not only information about the wage demands of the various industrial sectors but a lot of cigarette smoke with it. When it came time to scan the data, the machines cried error. Apparently the retrieval of information was made impossible because traces of smoke had got onto the floppy disks.

Despite this burgeoning no-smoking movement, sales of cigarettes have not fallen off much because, while middle-aged and older men have kicked the habit, young women have taken it up as quite chic.

The greatest benefit, however, has been for sales of chewing gum, cough drops and other cheap candies. Chewing gum acts as a substitute for cigarettes in restless mouths, but it also adds to the work of cleaners who must scrape it up from station stairways. In fiscal 1991 sales of chewing gum stretched by 5% from the previous year, and cough drops by as much as 40%. One might say that as long as the no-smoking movement continues to grow, chewing gum makers will be laughing all the way to the bank. ■

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