

## Tobacco health risks under spotlight: Hookah more harmful than cigarettes



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### Social Desk

The harmful and deadly effects of tobacco once again came under the spotlight on the occasion of the World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) that was marked on Wednesday. The member states of the World Health Organization passed a resolution in 1988, calling for the annual celebration of World No Tobacco Day on May 31. This year's theme is "We need food, not tobacco". The 2023

global campaign aims to highlight alternative crop production and marketing opportunities for tobacco farmers and encourage them to grow sustainable and nutritious crops. Smoking causes cancer, heart and lung diseases, stroke, diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Smoking also increases the risk of tuberculosis, certain eye diseases and problems of the immune sys-

tem, including rheumatoid arthritis. Iran is among countries that are grappling with adverse impacts of tobacco use. Experts say Iranians smoke up to 60

billion cigarettes every year. Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent annually to treat diseases caused by smoking in the country. Zahra Sheikhi, the spokesperson of the Iranian Parliament's Health Commission, told Iran Newspaper about the harmful effects of tobacco use.

"The consumption of tobacco such as smoking cigarettes and hookah is among main causes of developing all kinds of cancers. Approximately 90 percent of lung cancers are caused by smoking cigarettes and other tobacco products, which inflict irreparable damage to the society," she said. The lawmaker added that western sanctions have hampered Iran's efforts to import life-saving drugs.

She, however, said the sanctions imposed by the West on Iran have not applied to tobacco products such as cigarettes.

Sheikhi called for raising taxes on tobacco products in order to reduce their consumption.

"On the one hand, increasing taxes on tobacco products can deter people from smoking. On the other hand, the related revenues can be spent on promoting the health sector and building sports centers." Masoud Ehtesham, a lung specialist and faculty member of the University of Medical Sciences of Yazd, also weighed in on the harmful effects of smoking.

"World No Tobacco Day reminds people and officials that they should take the harmful effects of tobacco consumption seriously. Nothing justifies the use of cigarettes because cigarettes are the killers of people in the society," he said.

The specialist noted that family members of smokers are not immune from the harmful effects of cigarettes.

"Family members of smokers who are exposed to second-hand smoke are at risk of developing cancers."



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Ehtesham also rejected the idea regarding harmlessness of electronic cigarettes. "E-cigarettes have a mechanism which is like regular cigarettes. They cause the release of toxic substances in the body, an abnormal buildup of fluid in the lungs and damage the respiratory system."

The specialist also raised the alarm about the health risks posed by smoking hookah.

"Scientific studies have revealed that smoking hookah for a session is equivalent to smoking 70 ciga-

rettes," he said.

Gholamreza Heydari, director of Tobacco Prevention and Control Research Center at Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, also touched upon the percentage of Iranian who consume tobacco products.

"With regard to the number of those who smoke cigarettes and hookah as a hobby, between 20 percent and 25 percent of Iranians use tobacco products. Compared to global statistics, we are in an average position."

## Unsung heroes: Iranian rangers and their uphill battle to protect nature

### Social Desk

Iranian environmentalists face significant challenges and dangers in their mission to protect wildlife and ecosystems. Despite their efforts, there is no official day dedicated to their cause, but an unofficial day called "National Environment Day" has been informally designated. Park rangers play a crucial role in enforcing fishing and hunting laws, safeguarding the environment, and preventing encroachments, yet their responsibilities are often overlooked. Iran has a disproportionately high number of casualties among environmental conservationists, with over 150 losing their lives, including 108 in armed conflicts while protecting various species. The situation is severe, evident from the abundance of media coverage on the subject. Legal challenges arise when rangers use force against poachers, and the scarcity of rangers and inadequate equipment make it difficult to establish the necessity of lethal force. Changes in the law regarding protection and insurance for environmental officers have been made, but issues persist. The plight of Iranian environmentalists is apparent, as they face dangers, lack recognition, and struggle with legal challenges. Rangers face a predicament in proving their lives were endangered when using firearms, leading to imprisonment for some. Suggestions include taking away their weapons and equipping rangers with microphones and cameras to capture incidents and alert the police.

Unprotected in absence of law Before 2020, environmentalists faced even greater chaos, with legal proceedings and potential execution for shooting

to eghtesadonline.com enacted in that year to protect rangers in legal actions but failed to address the underlying issues. An amendment bill is currently being discussed in Parliament to provide a permanent resolution to environmentalists' firearm usage.



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Efforts are underway to amend the law on carrying weapons, with specialized government committees prioritizing this issue since January 2021. Environmentalists will be treated distinctively in the deliberations on weapon possession. The delay in approving amendments to the law on firearm possession has resulted in grave consequences for environmentalists, including loss of life. The Parliament Research Center has proposed changes to the outdated law on weapons use by armed forces officers, aiming to include environmentalists and establish legal limits for their firearm use. The current law fails to address the responsibilities of rangers, leaving them vulnera-

ble in court proceedings when confrontations with violators result in injury or death. The proposed amendment seeks to authorize rangers to use weapons against armed poachers who illegally enter protected areas. Inconsistencies between the regulations governing the use of weap-

ons by environmental guards and those applicable to other armed forces exist. Rangers are allowed to shoot individuals below the waist in their designated protection zone if lives are endangered. The absence of legislation on ranger weapon possession exposes them to attacks within protected areas. Addressing these gaps in the law and providing support for rangers are crucial for their safety and effective protection of the environment. Poachers are endangering rangers and causing casualties, while non-lethal options are unavailable. The lack of attention and response to repeated requests and protests regarding this issue is criticized.

Underpaid rangers

Iranian environmentalists not only face challenges related to firearms but also suffer from inadequate living conditions and lower salaries compared to their counterparts in other countries.

The income disparity affects

their livelihood and their ability to support their families. Improving the living conditions and compensation for environmentalists is crucial to their effective presence and environmental protection. Environmental professor Esmaeil Kahrom highlights the inadequate salaries and lack of legal protection for these dedicated individuals, which result in numerous difficulties. Dedicated environmentalists, known as nature guardians, advocate for improved living conditions and shed light on the challenges they encounter in their mission to protect nature. Interviews with these environmentalists reveal their financial struggles, low salaries, and difficulty in affording rent and basic needs. They express

their passion for their profession but lament the lack of recognition and support compared to military personnel. Housing support is identified as a crucial requirement. While other organizations provide housing cooperatives, environmentalists are excluded from this benefit. The insufficient resources and equipment hinder their ability to effectively protect nature.

Lack of high-tech gadgets

The absence of modern technology, such as CCTV cameras and GPS in ranger vehicles, increases risks and limits their effectiveness. The Department of Environmental also suffers from insufficient equipment and declining wireless communication capabilities, negatively impacting communication. Nature guards emphasize the need for drones and quadcopters for effective monitoring, as poachers possess superior facilities and advanced weapons.

The shortage of environmentalists in proportion to the protected areas is a recurring concern. A report reveals the challenging working conditions of environmental guards, including long working hours and heavy workloads. Iran falls short of meeting the standard ratio of rangers to protected areas, with each ranger being responsible for ten times the recommended area.

These findings underscore the urgent need for a higher number of environmentalists, improved recognition, and support to address the pressing issues faced by these dedicated individuals. Efforts should focus on providing them with adequate resources, equipment, and housing support to ensure the effective protection of vast areas and address the workload imbalance.

## Foodborne illness outbreaks at restaurants linked to sick workers



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Sick employees are major contributors to the spread of foodborne illnesses at restaurants and other food establishments, according to a report released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. From 2017 to 2019, the report found, around 40% of foodborne illness outbreaks with known causes were at least partly associated with food contamination by a sick or infectious worker. Norovirus, a stomach bug that causes vomiting and diarrhea, was the most common pathogen involved in foodborne illness outbreaks at U.S. restaurants during the years studied, according to the report. It accounted for 47% of the 800 outbreaks that the CDC identified. Salmonella — a bacteria that causes diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps — accounted for nearly 19%.

The report recommended that restaurants develop and enforce policies that require sick workers

to notify their manager if they have symptoms and to stay home if they're ill, NBC News wrote.

"Ill workers continue to play a substantial role in retail food establishment outbreaks, and comprehensive ill worker policies will likely be necessary to mitigate this public health problem," the report's authors wrote.

While most restaurants have at least some guidelines for sick workers, the CDC found that the policies are often incomplete. Around 92% of the managers the CDC interviewed said their establishment had a policy requiring food workers to report symptoms if they feel sick, but just 66% said those policies were written. And just 23% said their restaurant's policy listed all five of the symptoms that guidelines from the Food and Drug Administration suggest warrant notifying a manager: vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice, sore throat with fever or a lesion with pus.