

Chinese officials banned from smoking in public as Beijing moves to curb dirty habits

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The Chinese government has urged party officials to stop smoking in public places and help colleagues quit in a bid to curb the country's dirty habits.

It also banned government bodies from providing cigarettes or promoting smoking, warning that the use of tobacco in offices, meeting rooms, canteens and toilets is strictly prohibited.

Authorities warned party officials that buying cigarettes with public money won't be tolerated, and those who break the rules should be penalised and educated about their "evil influence".

The circular issued by the cabinet did not specify details of the punishment.

Similarly, the state council reiterated that smoking on high-speed trains is forbidden and those who do could be fined up to 2000 yuan, or £200, from January 2014.

The Chinese government added that smoking "not only endangers public health and environment, but also harms the image of the Communist party and the government", which has been marred by a series of high-profile corruption scandals in recent years.

China is the world's largest manufacturer and consumer of tobacco with more than 350 million smokers, according to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which has repeatedly criticised the "absence of political will" to curb smoking.

It is also a profitable industry with state-owned tobacco companies, operating almost exclusively in China, accounting for 38 per cent of the world's production.

Beijing pledged to ban smoking in public venues back in 2008, but these rules are frequently ignored.