

# Secondhand smoke has more fuming, hotline finds

By ASAKO MURAKAMI

Staff writer

OSAKA — Phones rang off the hook at a small office in Osaka's Chuo Ward late last month as a citizen's group called Tabakoresu fielded calls from nonsmokers during its annual hotline to help people vent their views on the age-old habit in Japan.

The group, which advocates a "tobaccoless" society, received 106 calls during the six-hour session, with complaints about smoking on streets and smoking on balconies increasing. Complaints about smoking in the workplace decreased from last year.

"With more and more places, such as public places and offices, becoming smoke-free, it seems that more smokers are puffing away on the street and out on the veranda while at home," said Hiroshi Nogami of the group. But as smokers are banished to less-comfortable venues, nonsmokers are learning to be more assertive about their rights.

One mother phoned in to the hotline to express her concern that her child could be burned accidentally by people smoking as they walk on sidewalks.

An Izumisano woman said she is irked by cigarette smoke that wafts into her apartment when her neighbor lights up on the veranda.

"I've heard that the wife (living next door), who does not like the smoke, has asked her husband to smoke on the balcony. I complained about it to her, but it still continues," she said.

Tabakoresu recommends setting out an electric fan to blow away cigarette smoke that may come from neighbors.

In Osaka Prefecture in 1995, 53.4 percent of men were smokers, only slightly exceeding the national average of 52.7. The rate for female smokers, however, was 17.5 percent, much higher than the national average of 10.6 percent, according to prefectural statistics.

Noting that people from

outside Osaka tend to find the city very smoky, Nogami said, part of this reason may be that smokers here "lack manners."

Indeed, he said, many callers to the group's hotline were incensed with bad smoking manners, including people who light up in clearly marked no-smoking areas at train stations and even aboard trains.

A pregnant woman e-mailed the group to say she is upset that her husband's friends "seem indifferent to the effects their smoking might have on the baby."

Health problems from secondhand smoking can be as serious as those for smokers. Many studies show that the cancer-related death rate of a nonsmoking spouse to a smoker goes up in accordance with the number of cigarettes smoked, according to the Health and Welfare Ministry.

To make life easier for nonsmokers, Nogami's group provides health education classes and a list of smoke-

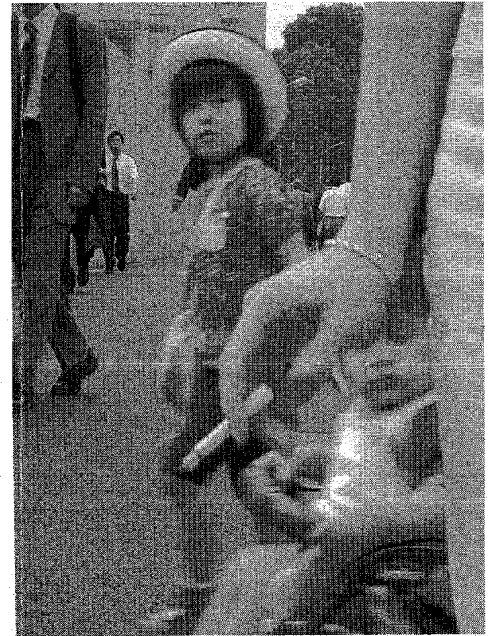
free restaurants. But, he said, such efforts cannot achieve much unless the central and local governments enforce antismoking regulations.

When the Wakayama Municipal Government introduced an ordinance to ban throwing cigarette butts on the street in 1992, it prompted other cities and towns to follow suit.

Nogami said he hopes another local government will set an example by banning smoking while walking, although local authorities appear to be more reluctant about such a restriction.

The Osaka Municipal Government went ahead to put a ban on littering with empty cans and cigarette butts in November 1995.

But the boundaries between a smoker's right to smoke and a nonsmoker's right to breathe clean air make regulations — including banning smoking while walking — difficult to pass, says an official of the municipal environmental department.



**CIGARETTE SMOKE** can be dangerous to children. Calls are mounting to prohibit people from smoking while they walk on the street. TOSHIKI SAWAGUCHI PHOTO