

A-CIG-NATIONS – COMING TO A PUB NEAR YOU

Outdoor pub smoking areas set to become new hub of gossip and flirting

Smoke may not be in the air but love could be once the English smoking ban comes into force next month, a new study shows.

With smokers forced to step outside to light up, smoking shelters across England are set to be the backdrop for flirtatious fellas and gossiping girls, according to research by leading pub group Greene King.

The pub group quizzed smokers about how they use outside smoking areas already in existence at workplaces around the UK and if that would translate to social settings once the ban kicks in on July 1st. And smokers admit that while they use work “smoking rooms” now for gossip, flirting and dishing the dirt on others, the same thing will definitely happen down their locals during leisure time.

More than half of smokers questioned (51%) spend up to 20 minutes a day on cigarette breaks while at work, with over a third (37%) admitting to using those breaks for gossip and a flirt. Almost twice as many men (46%) than women (24%) admit to having already flaunted their flirting skills whilst smoking outside. One in ten have gone on to date the woman they had an “a-cig-nation” with.

Flirting whilst smoking – dubbed *smirting* when it was first identified in Ireland when its ban came in in 2004 - is set to increase once the English ban begins. And it's men who are most likely to be brushing up on their pulling power, found Greene King. Research showed English men are almost three times more likely than women to use smoking shelters as an opportunity to chat up the opposite sex while women are most likely to use the shelters for a girly gossip, with outside smoking areas replacing pub loos as the place to have a quiet natter. Nearly half of women smokers quizzed (47%) said they now use smoking shelters for a goss rather than a trip to the “ladies”.

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Greene King's David Elliott said: "Our poll of existing smoking habits in the office has enabled us to identify a new breed of social smokers soon to hit Britain's outdoor areas in pubs and bars. We at Greene King has invested £10million in making outdoor areas as comfortable as possible for our customers who still want to light up - so whether they're looking to meet Miss or Mr Right or simply want a gossip away from the throng, they can be assured their surroundings won't let them down."

Further findings of the research include:

- Females are by no means naïve to the fact that men are on the prowl for puffing passion, with as many ladies as lads believing that outdoor flirting will increase once the smoking ban kicks in
- Almost a third of office workers already use their cigarette break as a chance to discuss their work-life prospects or a new job opportunity
- Twice as many men than women already use an outside cigarette to get an inside track on a job opportunity.
- This is set to continue with 63% of men likely to use outdoor smoking areas in pubs to network for new job opportunities when they go for a pint after work
- The North East is the most flirtations region (52% admitted to flirting whilst having a cigarette outside) with the North West being the least flirtatious (20% confessed)
- The East Midlands holds the largest number of gossip mongers (60% of smokers admitted that they would share gossip whilst having a cigarette outside a bar), with London and the South West being the least likely to indulge in hearsay (33%)
- Smokers in the West Midlands are most likely to look to outdoor smoking areas for new job opportunities (76%). Smokers in East England were found to be the least ambitious in terms of seeking out new job opportunities in outdoor smoking areas (40%)

Said Elliott: "There is no doubt that pub life will change to a certain extent. While we are happy to accommodate smokers who still want a cigarette as part of their trip to the local we are also mindful of helping those who want to quit and are seeing July 1st as the excuse they need."

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Contact details: For more information please call Sarah Atkinson or Chris Lawrence on 020 7287 2087

Notes to editors

Greene King owns and operates 2,300 pubs in England, Scotland and Wales.

ICM Research interviewed a random sample of 2007 adults aged 18+ by telephone between 8-14 June 2007. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.