

Changes to law on mandatory cleaning standards expected to be passed in October: Grace Fu



The new rules will be progressively implemented from next year, starting with higher-risk sectors with high footfall. PHOTO: ST FILE

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SINGAPORE - Changes to the law on cleaning standards are expected to be passed in Parliament next month to help the country deal with Covid-19 and other health risks, said Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu on Saturday (Sept 19).

She said the amendments to the Environmental Public Health Act are part of efforts to strengthen Singapore's environmental public health resilience against the current pandemic and dengue outbreak, as well as future public health threats.

The changes to the Act includes implementing mandatory cleaning standards, such as a regime that specifies frequency for routine cleaning and deep cleaning for disinfection. Environmental sanitation controls will also be enhanced and accountability will be required of premise owners.

The proposed changes were announced earlier this year when Singapore was in the early stages of its fight against Covid-19.

The new rules will be progressively implemented from next year, starting with higher-risk sectors with high footfall, and areas with vulnerable users, such as childcare centres, said Ms Fu, who was speaking at a virtual launch of the Public Hygiene Council's (PHC) month-long Keep Clean, Singapore campaign.

The annual campaign encourages Singaporeans to take ownership of the cleanliness of shared public spaces, which has become more relevant amid the current Covid-19 pandemic and dengue outbreak.

This year's event aims to highlight that Singapore is in a "war against littering", by getting Singaporeans to recognise that litter is not just an aesthetic problem but can also be a public health threat.

Ms Fu also gave an update on the number of premises that have been awarded the SG Clean quality mark, which signifies if the operators have met certain hygiene standards.

As of end August, more than 22,000 premises across Singapore have received the quality mark, she said.

"This mark will be important to businesses, such as hotels and restaurants, who want to get their customers back by assuring them of the measures taken to safeguard their health," said Ms Fu.

"Ensuring the cleanliness of our public spaces is our shared responsibility. Beyond what the Government and owners of premises can do, members of the public - that's us - must help keep Singapore clean."

She cited the latest Public Cleanliness Satisfaction Survey released by the Singapore Management University on Friday, where 93 per cent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the cleanliness of public spaces they recently visited. The survey was based on responses collected from last December to April, before the start of the circuit breaker.

The findings, however, threw light on the Republic's reliance on cleaning services. Some 87 per cent of respondents acknowledged that Singapore is clean only because of the efficiency of its cleaning services.

On Saturday, the essential work of cleaners was also recognised by the PHC, which shared that it is unsustainable to simply rely on cleaners to maintain the nation's cleanliness. Singapore's clean and green image is in large part, thanks to the country's army of over 59,000 cleaners.

At the event, four of them had the opportunity to model the winning uniform designs created by students from Temasek Polytechnic's School of Design. The students had been tasked to come up with uniforms that are comfortable and functional but also instil a greater sense of pride.

In her speech, Ms Fu said: "They are our essential workers and front-line heroes. They have worked hard, particularly during this pandemic, to keep our public spaces clean, sanitised and litter-free."

The Covid-19 situation has provided the environmental services industry with an opportunity to transform, she added.