
Dutch cannabis smoker fined - for using tobacco

A man was fined by the Dutch police for smoking a cannabis joint but only because it was mixed with tobacco.

By Bruno Waterfield in Brussels
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While the Netherlands has kept its liberal policy on the smoking of cannabis in the country's legendary "coffee shops", zero tolerance is now shown to tobacco smokers in Dutch cafes and restaurants after a smoking ban came into force last July.

An Amsterdam police spokesman admitted that it could be difficult to understand the current Dutch policy of allowing smokers to puff away on pure cannabis while fining tobacco users.

"For logic it is sometimes impossible to explain, even to the Dutch," he said.

"The man was not fined for smoking a cannabis joint but for smoking. You can smoke cannabis but not tobacco in coffee shops."

The unnamed 27-year-old man owns one of the city's coffee shops, where the purchase and smoking of cannabis is tolerated, and he is expected to contest the case in court.

It will be the first test of a Dutch smoking ban that exempts people from enjoying joints as long as only pure marijuana is used.

The man was caught lighting a hand rolled cannabis joint during a routine police check and fined because officers found tobacco mixed with the soft drug.

The smoking ban is usually enforced by municipal health and safety inspectors "but if a police officer signals an infringement, he does not close his eyes to it," said the police spokesman.

A fifth of Dutch cafes and bars are ignoring the tobacco smoking ban, which was introduced on July 1. Many are setting up special funds to collect money to pay fines issued to smokers.

[Back to top](#)

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