

Text 6

(...) One of the world's top experts on diseases connected to smoking has complained to the National Theatre in London that he was shocked to witness members of the cast smoking in character during a production which was set in a red-light district.

Prof James D Sargent of the Dartmouth Medical School in the US has just published a big study of the effects of the ban on smoking in public places in Germany in the journal *Clinical Research in Cardiology*. He and his colleagues found that heart attacks fell there by 8% after the ban came into place.

Prof Sargent has also studied Britain, and on his last visit went to a production of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* at what is arguably Britain's premier theatre. During the interval, some actors remain on stage as the set is changed and smoke as part of their performance as low-life characters lounging outside sex-shops and bars as the production demands.

But Prof Sargent does not accept that it was necessary for the drama: "It puts the audience at risk", he told the BBC. "At the end of the interval, you could see the smoke in the air and clearly smell it." He is adamant that this is dangerous.

There is no scientific evidence, he said, that the air has to be thick with smoke for it to be harmful, adding that there is an increased risk, he said, with relatively small amounts.

The National Theatre said the actors smoked tobacco on stage because of the dramatic needs of the production. But it would not comment on whether there was a health risk to the audience or to the cast, or whether the risk had been assessed. Britain has a tough ban on smoking in public places, but a National Theatre representative said theatres were exempt if there was "artistic licence". (...)

In films, actors are nowadays often asked to smoke non-nicotine cigarettes - in film, what the cigarette smells like doesn't matter because the audience can't smell it. In the American series "Mad Men", for example, which is set in early 60s New York when offices were smoking zones, the actors often smoked herbal cigarettes.

Matthew Weiner, the creator of the series, was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying: "You don't want actors smoking real cigarettes. They get agitated and nervous. I've been on sets where people throw up, they've smoked so much".