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Last Updated: Wednesday, 26 April 2006, 15:23 GMT 16:23 UK

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Actors could escape smoking ban

Actors may be exempted from the smoking ban in England if lighting up on stage or in front of the cameras is key to their performance, officials say.



Patsy Stone: never without a fag

Characters like Absolutely Fabulous's chain-smoking Patsy would potentially not be able to smoke on set or on stage if next summer's ban goes ahead.

Theatres also argued they would not be able to portray historic figures like the cigar-smoking Winston Churchill.

Exemptions are now being considered where smoking is integral to the plot.

A spokesman said: "The government is considering providing a specific exemption from smoke-free legislation to ensure that smoking can take place on stage during live theatrical performances, or during film and television recording.

He added: "Details of the exemption will be set out in the regulations which will be consulted on over the summer.

"We will be consulting with the theatre industry on what they consider integral to the plot."

Public Health Minister Caroline Flint is writing to the industry on the issue.

A spokesman for Action on Smoking and Health said he did not oppose the exemption.

He said: "What we want to see is a complete ban on smoking in enclosed work places so any exceptions should be very tightly drawn.

"If a stage hand wants to have a smoke he should go outside and do it like everybody else."

'Responsibility'

But he said he did want to see film and television producers take a responsible attitude to the way smoking is portrayed.

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