

All slot machines must display winning odds

Rule for casinos by next October is to deter people from excessive gambling

By NG KAI LING

BY OCTOBER next year, all slot machines at the two casinos here must display the odds of a punter hitting winning combinations.

The Casino Regulatory Authority (CRA) implemented this requirement earlier this month to highlight how unlikely it is to end up with such combinations – in a move to deter people from over-exuberant gambling.

So far, about 20 per cent of the 5,000 slot machines in the casinos have complied with the rule.

The information, for example, that the odds of getting five of the same in a game is as high as one in 53,615, is displayed on the machines.

Mr Lee Kwong Yee, deputy director of CRA's gaming technology and information communication systems department, said the purpose is to let players know exactly "how remote it is to hit certain combinations".

He added that his department's job is to ensure that the machine

games are fair, secure and do not induce patrons to play more.

The rules also dictate that in the long run, 90 per cent of total bets will be returned as winnings to players. In Nevada in the United States, that figure must, on average, be at least 75 per cent.

In the second quarter of this year, about US\$2.74 billion (S\$3.3 billion) was fed into the slot machines at Marina Bay Sands (MBS), 15 per cent more than in the same period last year. The figure for Resorts World Sentosa is not available. Slot machines accounted for about 18 per cent of total bets at the MBS casino in the second quarter of this year.

All gaming machines have to be approved by CRA, which has its own laboratories to test them and equipment such as card shufflers.

It will also check the machine's serial number, the type of game installed and the machine's location in the casino.

The machines are also sealed to prevent tampering. "To change the settings of the machines, the

seals would have to be broken," said Mr Lee. "If the casino operators need to troubleshoot the machine, they have to inform CRA."

CRA inspectors regularly visit the casinos to make sure procedures are followed and that table games are conducted fairly.

Inspector Yao Siying said she and about 20 colleagues have to know the ins and outs of the casinos and learn the rules of all the games. She also deals with people who are excluded from the casinos but sneak in. This includes taking their statements on how they evaded security checks and how much they had won or lost.

"If they win, we have to ask them to cough up the winnings," said Ms Yao, who added that the money goes to the Tote Board.

Inspectors also handle disputes. One of Ms Yao's most memorable cases involved a slot-machine payout of more than \$50,000. A woman had tried to play on a machine but found that it was "locked" and the screen display indicated a winning hand.

Thinking she had won, she approached a casino staff member who told her otherwise. She lodged a claim with CRA. After going through the surveillance video and machine log, Ms Yao found

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that another punter had won but had left without realising his windfall.

The woman appealed against the decision but a CRA board, made up of individuals such as lawyers and community leaders, upheld Ms Yao's decision.

"I was glad that we found the rightful winner," said Ms Yao.
✉ kailing@sph.com.sg



An example of the information display showing the high odds of hitting certain combinations. All slot machines have to display such information by October next year to deter people from over-exuberant gambling. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO