

Casinos fined \$230k for entry breaches

Third time operators penalised for having people in casinos who should not be there

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EVEN as Marina Bay Sands (MBS) strengthens efforts to be a responsible casino operator, it was penalised for letting people enter or be on its premises when they had no business being there.

Yesterday, MBS and Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) were handed penalties amounting to a total of \$230,000.

The two casino operators had let in 27 people who had either been banned from the casinos, did not pay an entry levy, stayed beyond the 24 hours the levy entitled them to, or were minors.

MBS was responsible for 14 of the cases and fined \$130,000, while RWS's fine was \$100,000 for the remaining 13 cases.

This is the third time the casino operators have committed such breaches. Last year, they were fined a total of \$885,000 for 94 such cases.

RWS said yesterday it took the lapses seriously and would continue "to fine-tune our entry systems and processes".

MBS said it remained "committed to comply with the rules and regulations of the Casino Control Act".

Separately, MBS said it had trained a team of Responsible Gaming Ambassadors to help patrons who show signs of problem gambling.

These ambassadors will direct them to resources like the National Council on Problem Gambling's website and helpline, or such organisations as the National Addictions Management Service.

They will also point out the option of exclusion orders, which individuals can apply for to shut themselves out of casinos.

"You do have an obligation to have a conversation, at the very least, that connects them with the resources they need to get better," said Dr Bo Bernhard, executive director of the University of Nevada Las Vegas International Gaming Institute, who helped train the ambassadors.

All staff are already taught to listen for signs of gambling problems: for instance, if a patron exclaims he cannot go home as his spouse will be angry at him for losing so much. But starting from the programme's official launch next month, staff will direct such people to an ambassador for help.

Similar programmes are run at other casinos of Las Vegas Sands, the developer of the MBS integrated resort.

These ambassadors are not "interventionists" or mental health professionals, stressed Dr Bernhard. "Their job is to connect patrons with those who are."

If patrons rebuff their offer of help, the ambassadors will not press the issue.

In the past three days, 150 of its staff have been trained in the programme.

All casino floor staff already receive basic training on helping problem gamblers.

But the ambassadors are senior managers. They form an "elite group" meant to "come in when things get a little bit difficult, when there are moments of distress, even anger", said Dr Bernhard.

One of them is Ms Carmen Wong, 37, who took the course last Sunday.

"You might have a person with symptoms of being depressed or suicidal, or who says something like 'I've lost all my money, the money was from my company's funds, I need to win this game,'" said the pit manager of 12 to 14 tables in the casino.

Mr Maximilian Koh, director of Theye Hua Kwan Problem Gambling Recovery Centre, said many people were unaware of its services, which include counselling, help with applying for casino exclusion orders, and a 24/7 hotline.

"We participated in this training programme to provide them with more information," he added.

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