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Authorities crack down on two South Paterson hookah lounges

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PATERSON – City authorities temporarily shut down two hookah lounges in South Paterson over the weekend, a day after a man was wounded during a fight outside one of them.

Police officers cited the Big Apple Café at 967 Main Street for maintaining a nuisance, while fire officials issued safety code violations against the Paradise Lounge at 1017 Main Street, authorities said.

“These businesses are supposed to be operating as restaurants and they’re flouting the law,” said City Council President Andre Sayegh, who represents the 6th Ward, which includes the South [Paterson](#) area.

After being shut down late Friday night, both businesses were allowed to reopen for business Saturday night officials said. But Sayegh said he was working with the city’s legal department to see if the city could take more lasting measures against the lounges. Sayegh said he asked the police and fire departments to inspect the businesses after the shooting, especially because he said they have been the targets of other neighborhood complaints.

“Big Apple is rotten to the core and Paradise has been pure hell to the neighbors,” the council president said.

“The shooting that took place certainly didn’t help, but we already had a high number of complaints from the community with regards to these establishments,” said city public safety director Glenn Brown. “The enforcement will definitely be stepped up.”

One of the businesses was storing excessive amounts of charcoal in its basement “in clear violation of state fire code,” Brown said.

Brown suggested that the city council draft an ordinance covering the operation of hookah lounges. Over the past two years, the city’s enforcement efforts against trouble hookah spots primarily have relied on a state health law banning smoking at indoor businesses.

The summons for the Big Apple was issued to its owner, 33-year-old Mohanad Alrubaye of Madison Avenue, according to Capt. Troy Oswald. Alrubaye said the city inspectors wrongly issued him summonses for hookah pipes that were inside his business and not being used. He said all hookah smoking is conducted outside, in a rear patio area. “I follow all the rules,” said the owner. “I already have enough headaches.” Alrubaye said he acquired the business about six months. The previous owners had received numerous summonses and owed the city thousands of dollars in fines.

The owners of Paradise Lounge could not be reached for comment. Police have not yet arrested anyone in the shooting that took place outside its doors on Thursday night.

[Paterson](#) police imposed a temporary shutdown of one other South [Paterson](#) business, the Wild Bull bar on Buffalo Street on Thursday night, Oswald said. The bar’s owner, Krassimir Orachev, 57, of [Lodi](#), was cited for serving alcohol to minors, Oswald said.

In 2011 and 2012, city authorities issued numerous summonses to another South [Paterson](#) club, the Lava Lounge on [Montclair](#) Avenue, which eventually closed. A restaurant now operates at that location, Sayegh said.

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