

Three more North Jersey towns ban smoking in public places

THURSDAY MARCH 14, 2013, 5:16 PM
BY LINH TAT AND KIM LUEDDEKE
STAFF WRITERS
THE RECORD

Three more North Jersey municipalities — **Garfield, Secaucus and North Bergen** — have joined a growing chorus of towns throughout the state outlawing smoking in all parks and recreational facilities.



VIOREL FLORESCU

Karen Blumenfeld, Executive Director of GASP, holds a sign in front of North Bergen town hall.

The movement has gained momentum over the past few years, as officials cite medical studies that continue to link secondhand smoke with health risks.

Of the 566 municipalities in New Jersey, 166 ban smoking in some parks, and about half have banned them in all their parks, said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors Smokefree Policy, an advocacy group whose members have appeared before many town councils.

Eighty-five percent of adults in New Jersey don't smoke, and of those who do, 70 percent want to quit, Blumenfeld said.

Most "New Jersey residents don't smoke or want to be around smoke," she said. "That's how you can determine (smoke-free parks) make the most sense."

With this week's adoption of smoke-free policies by three more municipalities, the number of towns with comprehensive smoking bans in public parks and recreational areas stand at 15 in [Bergen County](#), 12 in [Passaic County](#) and four in [Hudson County](#), according to GASP. [Passaic County](#) parks, with the exception of the Preakness Valley Golf Course, are also smoke-free.

Officials in [Ridgewood](#), [Westwood](#) and [Fair Lawn](#) are considering bans, as well.

This week's [Garfield](#) ordinance bars individuals from lighting up cigars, cigarettes and electronic smoking devices in all public parks and recreational facilities owned or leased by the city, areas adjacent to those facilities such as parking lots or driveways, and any city vehicle.

Violators will be fined at least \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second offense and \$1,000 for each subsequent offense. City employees who break the rules could face disciplinary action.

"Maybe it won't stop everyone from smoking, but it could stop people from smoking in front of other people, like children," said Mayor Joseph Delaney, who quit smoking almost 25 years ago.

In [Secaucus](#), tobacco products were prohibited only at the Little League field and ice rink at Buchmuller Park, the Shetik Soccer Field, and the Mill Ridge soccer and softball fields before this week. On Tuesday, the mayor and council voted unanimously to extend the ban to all parks and recreational facilities.

Individuals caught smoking in prohibited areas first will receive a

warning, then a \$25 fine for the second violation and up to \$100 in fines for each subsequent offense.

One [Secaucus](#) resident called the ban “ridiculous.” “Smokers got rights, too,” he said during the council meeting. In [North Bergen](#), resident Herb Shaw objected to a similar ban, accusing township officials of moving toward a “totalitarian” regime.

But members of the [North Bergen](#) High School student council and environmental club thanked the council for its action. Giovanna Noguera, student council vice president and a member of the track and soccer teams, said it’s common for smokers to light up when athletes are practicing in the park. “It’s difficult when you’re gasping for air already (from the workout) and you’re not even breathing clean oxygen but chemicals,” she said.

Now, individuals will be fined \$50 the first time they’re caught smoking in public parks or recreational facilities, \$100 the second time and \$150 each time thereafter.

“We’re not going to have police running around, chasing people,” [North Bergen](#) Mayor Nicholas Sacco said. But, he added, the idea is to maintain a healthy environment in the parks. “Its time has come,” Sacco said.

Anti-tobacco advocates say smoking bans create less confusion about where people can or can’t smoke, reduce tobacco litter and send a consistent message to youths that smoking anywhere is not encouraged, not just in schools or work places. State law already prohibits smoking in municipal buildings.

Alan Kantz, program manager for GASP, said his organization is working actively to advocate for similar bans in the remaining towns in Bergen and Hudson counties.

“Our hope, at some point, is every municipality in the state and every county in the state will go 100 percent smoke-free,” Kantz said. “We’re in it for the long haul.”

Email: tat@northjersey.com or lueddeke@northjersey.com

[http://www.northjersey.com/news/health/Three more North Jersey towns ban smoking in public places.html](http://www.northjersey.com/news/health/Three_more_North_Jersey_towns_ban_smoking_in_public_places.html)