

Ban the butts

Editorial

The Burlington County Board of Freeholders said this week that all county parks will be smoke- and tobacco-free beginning May 31.

We join the American Cancer Society in lauding the county for making this decision. There is ample evidence to support it.

Secondhand smoke is a public health hazard, even outdoors. Concentrations of outdoor secondhand smoke can be as high as indoor concentrations, depending on where the smoking is taking place and the amount of secondhand smoke present, according to the nonprofit Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights.

Secondhand smoke can lead to serious illness and premature death in children and nonsmoking adults, according to the U.S. surgeon general, and increase the risk of developing a number of chronic diseases, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and diabetes.

Serious health implications are not the only reason we support smoke-free parks. There are environmental concerns as well.

A smoking ban will keep parks cleaner and could reduce maintenance costs. Most smokers are careful and courteous, but cigarette butts do litter streets, sidewalks and paths and can end up in our waterways. New Jersey Clean Ocean Action puts cigarette-related debris near the top of its list of the most collected during its annual beach cleanup.

Butts contain toxins and chemicals, and the filters are made from a plastic that does not biodegrade. It breaks down into small pieces that are highly toxic to fish, birds and other wildlife, and hazardous to pets and young children if eaten.

The danger of fire also is a compelling reason for the ban. The cause of a 2007 fire that devastated a park in Los Angeles was traced to a discarded cigarette. The freeholders are hardly outliers here. There are seven municipalities in the county, and about 180 in the state, that have smoke-free ordinances. New York City banned smoking in all of its public parks two years ago.

The parks are for all county residents to enjoy. While there should always be a reasonable balance between the rights of smokers and the rights of nonsmokers to breathe clean, fresh air, protecting the public health and welfare has to take priority. Prohibiting smoking in county parks does that.

http://www.phillyburbs.com/news/local/burlington_county_times_news/opinion/editorials/ban-the-butts/article_c2559805-a7b0-5275-8ee6-8be9b3b9bb3d.html