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## Camden County parks to enforce smoking ban

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Written by: [JOE COONEY](#) Courier-Post Staff

CAMDEN — A ban on smoking in all Camden County parks will officially go into effect today, especially at those parks that contain playgrounds.

A park policy prohibiting the smoking of tobacco products in the parks has been on the books since last year, Camden County officials said, but the ban has not been rolled out publicly nor has it been enforced.

“(The ban) will be difficult to police, and we’re not going to have smoking police,” said Freeholder Jeffrey Nash. “But we hope people will realize they should not be smoking in our parks. Especially around children playing in the playgrounds.”

The offense carries a \$50 fine, and the policy will be enforced by park police and municipal police, said county spokesman Dan Keashen.

No-smoking signs will be placed in all of the county’s 20 parks by the end of the summer, Keashen noted. There are already signs placed in Berlin Park and Von Nieda Park in Camden.

“This is a quality-of-life issue,” said Nash. “People come to our parks to enjoy the fresh air and nice views. They don’t need people blowing smoke in their face, and we don’t want people using our parks as ashtrays.”

Smoke-free parks need to, and should be, the new standard for healthy living, according to Jessica Backofen, the regional vice president of the American Cancer Society.

“There is no safe level of secondhand smoke, not even outdoors,” said Backofen. “It is a killer. Every year, 3,400 people die of lung cancer as a direct result of secondhand smoke.”

Nash said the no-smoking policy will be aggressively pushed on the public to make people understand that smoking will not be tolerated.

“We have asked the American Cancer Society to help us make all residents aware of the dangers of secondhand smoke and have them take seriously that smoking in outdoor spaces used for recreation is bad for the health of all those others using that facility,” Nash said.

Wednesday’s oppressive heat and humidity left Cooper River Park fairly empty, with only a handful of people there. None were smoking.

A park police officer, asked if he knew about the ban, shook his head and smiled. “I knew nothing about it,” said the officer, who asked not to be identified. “To me, (the ban) doesn’t make any sense.”