



## Camden County bans smoking in parks; Gloucester may follow suit

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By **Andy Polhamus/Gloucester County Times**



**CAMDEN** — **Camden County** is telling its smokers to keep their butts out of the park. The county has banned smoking inside the confines of its parks system, with a special emphasis on keeping secondhand smoke away from children on playgrounds. Although banning smoking outdoors may seem like an extreme measure, Freeholder Jeff Nash says he's not trying to impose on anyone's personal freedom.

"I can't require people not to smoke, but I can try to enforce restrictions on smoking that affect other people," he said.

"We don't want smokers to spread their health

risks to others."

Nash said that the Camden County Parks Department has heard complaints for years about discourteous smokers in parks. This, he said, is a response to those complaints. Nash expects the smoking ban to be treated like any other park ordinance.

"There are certain rules that people have to abide by in the park, and this is one of them."

Robert Angelo, the chief of parks police in Camden County, considers the ban one way the county can fulfill its responsibility to its citizens to improve their quality of life.

"We want people to come to the parks," he said.

"We want people to have an enjoyable experience."

Angelo says that part of that experience should be freedom from the health hazards of secondhand smoke, or the discarded cigarette butts that come with smoking in the park.

"Obviously, we don't want kids breathing secondhand smoke," he said.

"And we don't want them being exposed to their hands and feet going in cigarette butts. It's not sanitary and we don't want the kids to experience that."

Violators of the ban will be issued a written warning upon their first offense. Any offenses after that will result in a \$50 fine from the parks police. While Angelo and Nash both admit that strict enforcement of the ordinance will be difficult, they expect park visitors to treat it the same way they treat littering.

"We rely on common courtesy," Nash said.

"Not every rule can be strictly enforced, so we really do rely on the public for the most part to abide by the rules, and a great majority of people do."

Angelo said that he had faith in park visitors to help support the ordinance by way of simple discipline.

"I think that people can exercise enough control to not smoke when kids are playing on a playground," he said.

Gloucester County Freeholder Adam Taliaferro said he supported the ban and is working to implement similar measures in his own county.

"Anything we can do to keep our citizens healthy is an important step," he said.

He also agreed that visitors to county parks would be the first line of enforcement of the ban.

"If we all do our little piece, we can make this go a long way," said Taliaferro.

Visitors at Washington Lake Park in Washington Township said they liked the idea of barring smoking there.

"It makes sense. Smoking is anti-fitness," said Mike Krier of Westville.

"People who don't like smoking aren't going to want to walk past someone who is."

Kelly Lathrope, who was walking along a path through the park Wednesday with Krier, was particularly supportive of keeping smoking away from playgrounds.

"Secondhand smoke is the worst," she said.

“You don’t want your kids exposed to it.”

Taliaferro did not say a ban on smoking in Gloucester County parks was definite, but he confirmed that a review of current park policy was underway.

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