

Coalition presses N.J. to ban smoking at parks, beaches

March 28, 2012

By Phil Gregory



Dr. Fred Jacobs, chairman of the anti-smoking group New Jersey Breathes and former state Health Commissioner says Banning smoking in outdoor public places would send a message to young people that smoking is not an acceptable social activity. (Phil Gregory/WHYY)

A coalition of anti-smoking groups is urging the New Jersey Legislature to enact a statewide ban on smoking at parks and beaches.

Banning smoking in outdoor public places would send a message to young people that smoking is not an acceptable social activity, said former state Health Commissioner Fred Jacobs, chairman of the coalition New Jersey Breathes.

"Every kid that doesn't start is a kid that doesn't have to stop," Jacobs said Wednesday. "It's a kid who deprives big tobacco of a revenue stream, and it's a kid who doesn't become one of the 168,000 kids in New Jersey who will die prematurely because of smoking issues."

While advocates expect there will be opposition to the proposed ban, they say it could help reduce tobacco-related diseases that add to the costs of health care.

The health of young people is a major consideration, according to American Cancer Society vice president Blair Horner.

"This is part of sort of what the scientists call denormalizing the smoking experience. If you don't see it anywhere, you don't experience anywhere, and you see that the public is unwilling to accept it indoor or outdoor, teens are less likely to smoke," he said.

"There clearly will be people that don't like this idea, but 85 percent of the (N.J.) public doesn't smoke. Those are the folks, the overwhelming majority of people are the ones who are inconvenienced at best," Horner said. "And the U.S. surgeon general says that there's no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke."

Proposed legislation to ban smoking in outdoor public places failed to gain much traction in the last session of the Legislature. Advocates are hoping there will be more support for a ban this time around.

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