

Smoking bans on rise across North Jersey

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Smokers have fewer places to light up in North Jersey now that dozens of towns and cities have made it illegal to smoke in public parks. More than a quarter of New Jersey municipalities have banned smoking in outdoor public areas including parks, ballfields, beaches and pools, in measures that have passed with little or no public opposition.

The spread of smoking bans reflects a shift in public opinion; once viewed by many as an unnecessary infringement on individual rights, smoking bans are now largely welcomed as health measures that promote the greater public good. "You can no longer deny the effects from secondhand smoke and, for that reason, I think smokers are more respectful of those around them," said Mayor Richard LaBarbiera of [Paramus](#), where the council banned smoking in recreation areas last year. No one spoke against the ordinance at the council's public hearing, LaBarbiera said.

[Paramus](#) is now one of 160 municipalities and 12 counties in the state that restrict smoking in outdoor public areas. That includes 14 [Passaic County](#) municipalities and 22 in [Bergen County](#), according Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, GASP, which has advocated for such laws across the state. Both counties also prohibit smoking in their parks.

The group is working with 24 more towns and cities — 19 in [Bergen County](#) and five in [Hudson County](#) — that are considering similar measures, said Executive Director Karen Blumenfeld. Lately, anti-smoking laws are being adopted or expanded at a rate of about one a week, she said. "More people are becoming aware of the health benefits of smoke-free parks," Blumenfeld said. The shift is in part because people saw the success New Jersey's Smoke-Free Air Act of 2006, which banned smoking in indoor public places and workplaces. Another turning point came in 2011, when New York City prohibited smoking in all its parks and beaches, inspiring New Jersey towns and cities to do the same, Blumenfeld said. A 2011 Gallup poll found that a majority of Americans, 59 percent, supported a ban on smoking in "all public places." Ten years earlier, just 39 percent favored smoking bans, Gallup reported.

In [Wayne](#), where the township board banned smoking at parks and ballfields last year, "not a single person got up to speak against it," said Mayor Christopher Vergano. And there have been no complaints since, he added. That wasn't the case in [Waldwick](#), where three residents asked the council to create a designated smoking section in borough parks as part of its anti-smoking ordinance. They said they liked to enjoy cigars in the park. Their request was denied, and a full smoking ban was adopted in December. [Waldwick](#) resident Mike Mazzeo said the men and other smokers should have a place to gather like anyone else. He said it was "ridiculous that [officials] are attacking a legal product so vehemently."

"You have to accommodate smokers or make it illegal," said Mazzeo, who doesn't smoke. Mazzeo said smokers also had rights and the ban was "over the top." "It seems to be too much governmental control in a country that's supposed to be the freest in the world," he said.

Around North Jersey, the rise in smoking bans has coincided with a decline in smoking. Fines vary from town to town for violations and can range from \$50 to \$2,000, depending on the number of offenses a person has. Officials said most people respect the law. Blumenfeld believes there is room for improvement. She hopes legislators will pass a statewide smoking ban for public recreation areas that will create uniformity in the law in New Jersey's 565 municipalities. "We've seen more and more towns and counties pass smoke-free policies," she said, "and we hope the state will take it as a sign."

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