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Washington Township bans smoking in public parks

Kimberly Redmond, April 8, 2014

The Township of Washington is the latest municipality in Bergen County to ban smoking in public parks.

An ordinance prohibiting smoking in any township-owned park, playground, field or recreational facility, as well as in adjacent areas, such as parking lots and walkways, was adopted by the council during its April 7 meeting.

The policy will be enforceable by township police officers as well as "any individual who observes a violation and wishes to make a complaint," according to the ordinance. The ban applies to the use of cigars, cigarettes, pipes and electronic cigarettes.

Violators face up to a \$250 fine for the first offense, up to \$500 for the second offense and \$1,000 for any offense beyond that.

Mayor Janet Sobkowicz said on Monday evening that the New Jersey Department of Health will provide the township with free signs to alert the public of the new policy.

Part of the push to designate public parks and recreation areas as smoke-free zones is an ongoing effort by the Bergen County Integrated Municipal Advisory Council.

The coalition, which is comprised of tobacco control experts, works to increase public health awareness about the dangers of secondhand smoke as well as the importance of educating children on not beginning the habit. They've also touted the economical and environmental benefits associated with a ban, including reduced maintenance of parks as well as limiting the threat that discarded cigarettes pose to pets walked in parks.

Twenty-five towns in Bergen County now have policies in place, including River Vale and Westwood. Fifteen of those municipalities have 100 percent smoke-free policies, while the remainder prohibit smoking in one form or another.

Currently, officials in Emerson and Woodcliff Lake are weighing similar bans.

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