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Secaucus considers extension of smoking ban to all parks, play areas

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SECAUCUS — A group championing smoking bans in municipal parks is stepping up efforts in [Hudson County](#) after making headway in [Passaic County](#) and parts of [Bergen County](#) last year.

Representatives from the Summit-based Global Advisors Smokefree Policy and other agencies spoke before the [Secaucus Town Council](#) this week, urging officials to extend their ban on smoking in several parks to other recreational sites in town.

Mayor Michael Gonnelli, who oversaw the Public Works Department when the council first banned smoking in some of the parks, vowed to put forth a new ordinance at the next council meeting that includes the town's remaining 20-plus parks and recreational sites.

Under existing town codes, tobacco products are prohibited at the Little League field and ice rink at Buchmuller Park, the Shetik Soccer Field and the Mill Ridge soccer and softball fields.

"Quite a few of our parks are already banned, so for us, it's just a matter of adding the rest," said Gonnelli, noting that a comprehensive ban "makes all the sense in the world."

"Watching a child go to a playground to play in a healthy environment and have to deal with secondhand smoke, it shouldn't be," he said.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of GASP, said while the New Jersey Smoke-free Air Act prohibits smoking in indoor public spaces, it is important to extend that policy to the outdoors.

"It gives a consistent message to children that it's not OK to smoke inside, but it's also not OK to smoke outside," Blumenfeld said. About 90 percent of people start smoking before they turn 18, she said.

Although [Secaucus](#) would not be the first municipality in [Hudson County](#) to have a comprehensive smoking ban in parks, Blumenfeld indicated that her organization is just starting to ramp up efforts in the county. Secaucus' move toward a 100 percent ban on smoking in parks would be another win for anti-tobacco advocates, who have had much success in [Passaic County](#).

At least a dozen of [Passaic County](#)'s 16 municipalities have smoke-free parks — the highest rate of any county in the state. And the [Passaic](#) County freeholders also voted unanimously last fall to prohibit smoking in the county's 12 parks.

"We had great success in [Passaic County](#) last year," Blumenfeld said. "We truly hope to see a similar momentum for [Hudson County](#) in 2013."

[Cliffside Park](#) in [Bergen County](#) adopted a smoking ban in November. Twenty other municipalities in the county have at least a partial ban, according to GASP.

In addition to the health benefits of smoke-free environments, Blumenfeld said, banning smoking in parks results in less cleanup. After New York City implemented a ban in 2000, the amount of smoking-related litter, such as cigarette butts and wrappers, was cut by half, she said.

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