

Proposed NJ smoking ban would extend to beaches, parks

By David Levinsky Staff writer | Posted: Monday, July 8, 2013 5:45 am

The list of outdoor places where smokers would be permitted to light up would shrink significantly if a pair of bills introduced by two state legislators become law.

Smoking is already banned at all Burlington County parks and recreation areas as well as those in at least seven county municipalities. Under the two bills written by 8th District Republicans Sen. Dawn Marie Addiego and Assemblyman Chris Brown, smoking would also be banned in all state parks, beaches and wildlife management areas, and "any property acquired or developed with the help of state funds for recreation and conservation purposes."

The latter provision effectively would make smoking off-limits in nearly all municipal parks and recreational fields because most have received funds through the state's Green Acres program.

"As a mother, I am troubled by anything that threatens the health of our children," Addiego said in a statement. "Parents should be able to drop down a beach blanket without worrying about being downwind from smokers and exposing their family to secondhand smoke."

Brown also cited health concerns.

"The data is definitive. Smoke is detrimental to health, and even indirect exposure to cigarette smoke is harmful," the assemblyman said. "It is especially dangerous for young lungs."

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP), said that the idea of banning smoking at state parks and beaches is not new, but that support has grown steadily in recent years as more and more towns and counties have approved restrictions.

"More than 190 towns and counties combined in the state of New Jersey have enacted ordinances. That's about one third of all counties and towns," Blumenfeld said Friday. "There's a grass-roots effort by local and county officials especially."

The Burlington County Board of Freeholders recently enacted a policy banning smoking in all county parks. Beverly, Burlington Township, Delran, Edgewater Park, Evesham, Mansfield and Palmyra also have local ordinances banning tobacco use at their parks and ballfields.

Mount Holly has proposed making all of its playgrounds and parks smoke-free, but has yet to finalize the ban.

In addition to the dangers posed by secondhand smoke, Blumenfeld said banning smoking in parks and recreational areas discourages children from taking up the habit, helps smokers quit, prevents wildfires, and saves towns money on the cost of cleaning up cigarette-butt litter.

The measures sponsored by Addiego and Brown would provide some much-needed uniformity across the state, Blumenfeld said.

"There's plenty of places without the bans. From our standpoint, it's best to provide equal protection to all residents and visitors," she said. "Since there's no safe level of secondhand smoke, it's best to educate people about the dangers of exposure, and these types of policies do that."

Representatives from the Citizens Lobbying Against Smoker Harassment could not be reached for comment Friday. The group's founder told the Burlington County Times in March that claims about the dangers posed by secondhand

smoke in outdoor environments are dubious.

“While harm from another’s cigarette smoke indoors remains debatable, there is zero valid scientific evidence that someone smoking outdoors is harmful to anyone,” said Audrey Silk, founder of the nonprofit organization based in New York City. “They cherry-pick from the only study they have to point to and ultimately fail to report the author’s final conclusion: When the cigarette goes out, the smoke is gone — not like in a bar, where it hangs around for hours.”