

Casino smoking regulations / Follow the rules

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Folks who think Atlantic City casinos can regulate themselves must be dismayed by word of the sad job they are doing obeying the city's partial smoking ban.

Four years after the city adopted a partial smoking ban in casinos, apparent violations are common. A Press reporter recently documented them at eight of the city's 11 gaming halls. They ranged from patrons openly smoking in "non-smoking" areas to a lack of signs designating smoke-free locations.

For a time, Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino and Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort drew their non-smoking plan to include such strange contrivances as having gaming tables themselves be non-smoking, while allowing smoking in the seats around them.

At one casino, two slot machines sitting side by side each bear a sign. One prohibits smoking, the other allows it.

At another casino, one side of a craps table is a smoking area, the other side is smoke-free.

And there seems to be almost no effort to enforce the ban, either on the city's part or by the gaming halls themselves.

We've said before that Atlantic City should ban smoking on casino floors. The health danger to employees who have to work in smoke-filled rooms outweighs the concern that non-smoking sections may be bad for business.

But, at the very least, Atlantic City's casinos should be working harder to obey existing smoking regulations, especially now.

New Jersey's answer to the increasing competition our gaming halls face has been an unprecedented level of cooperation between government and the casino industry.

Regulations are being eased. State inspectors are no longer present on every gaming floor and in the counting rooms. The Division of Gaming Enforcement recently adopted an "emergency" rule to allow casinos to do away with pit bosses.

Each such change is accompanied by assurances that the industry will follow all necessary rules and is capable of policing itself.

Unfortunately, it is human nature to cut corners. And the pressure to meet the bottom line can be a powerful incentive for the best-intentioned to look the other way.

Which is why casino operators should be demonstrating their good faith by meticulously following the partial smoking ban, and every other current regulation. The law is the law. If you don't like it, work to change it.

In the meantime, if casinos want a more relaxed regulatory climate, they need to act more responsibly in the existing climate.