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N.J. Assembly advances smoking ban for beaches and parks

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Smoking on beaches along the Jersey Shore could soon be banned by state law. Lawmakers advanced a bill Thursday that would expand bans on smoking in public places to include public parks and beaches.

Current law bans smoking in indoor public places or workplaces, but advocates for the bill say its passage would discourage a young generation of new smokers, as well as reduce pollution at beaches.

The Tourism and Gaming Committee voted Thursday to release the bill to the full Assembly, citing reasons of support to include reduction in beach pollution and reducing health risks to second-hand smokers.

As of Jan. 2, more than 180 municipalities in the U.S. have smoke-free beaches, including 14 in New Jersey, according to a statement from the Assembly Democrats Thursday.

Long Beach Island communities passed the ban last year, and Ship Bottom lifeguards said the implementation went smoothly during the summer. Cape May Point was also considering the idea late last year.

“It’s an educational tool to not begin to smoke because children are very susceptible and they want to mimic adult behavior,” Cindy Meakem, coordinator at the Center for Prevention and Counseling, said at Thursday’s hearing in Trenton.

Meakem said that as a former smoker she understands how hard of an addiction it is to break.

While there is always a question about enforcement, the reaction so far in towns that have enacted the ban have been mostly positive, advocates said.

Those advocates acknowledged that not everyone would follow the rule, but they said it would help reduce litter at the beach and prevent the toxic chemicals found in cigarette butts and cigars from entering the waters as well.

On one beach in Ocean County, an individual recently collected more than 500 cigarette butts, Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, told the Assembly hearing.

“If you have a dirty beach it’s not a place you want to come back to,” Tittel said. “It’s good, common-sense legislation.”

Additionally, restricting the number of places smokers can go will reform the social norm, said Ethan Hasbrouck, a spokesman for the American Cancer Society.

Lowering the visibility of role models who smoke and giving smokers fewer places to go will make non-smoking the accepted social behavior, he said.

“This is common-sense approach to maintain the beauty and pristine quality of our parks and beaches while also protecting public health. We’re all better off if we get this done,” said Aneolica Jimenez, D-Hudson, Bergen.

The bill was advanced to the General Assembly, but a date for the hearing has not been set yet.

Violators would face a \$250 fine for a first offense, \$500 for a second offense and \$1,000 for subsequent violations, according to the bill, which would take effect 180 days after enactment.

http://m.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/ap/new_jersey/n-j-assembly-advances-smoking-ban-for-beaches-and-parks/article_fa3ae790-9a1e-11e3-9690-001a4bcf887a.html?mode=jqm