

Smoking at Revel / Disappointing, but ...

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Nearly two years ago, we praised Revel's decision to be Atlantic City's first smoke-free casino.

In 2011, Kevin DeSanctis, then the company's chief executive officer, admitted the no-smoking policy scared him but said it was a business decision. "The market we're targeting is fundamentally a nonsmoking market," DeSanctis said at the time.

But Revel has been treading water since its April 2, 2012, opening, and its gambling revenues have been disappointing.

The casino filed for bankruptcy on March 25, and since then it has come up with a restructuring plan designed to reduce its debt obligations by hundreds of millions of dollars, giving creditors an equity stake in the company.

The company will also take on a new marketing strategy and add new entertainment and dining options.

And part of that restructuring plan is to add a smoking section to the casino, a detour from its bold decision to be completely smoke-free.

"As we evaluate our business model and look for ways to improve the long-term viability of Revel, we are carefully weighing the benefits of and how best to introduce a designated smoking area within the casino," Jeffrey Hartmann, Revel's interim CEO, said in a statement.

We all know smoking causes myriad health problems.

We all know secondhand smoke causes myriad health problems.

And the Surgeon General has found that smoke-free workplace

policies are "the only effective way to eliminate secondhand smoke exposure in the workplace. Separating smokers from nonsmokers, cleaning the air, and ventilating buildings cannot eliminate exposure."

But, the reality is, we all know people (including plenty of gamblers) smoke.

Revel is a business, and at the end of the day if the casino and the jobs it provides are to survive, something had to change - including, unfortunately, its no-smoking policy.

Will smokers save Revel? Probably not.

"It was a risk going smoke-free to begin with, and there's a risk to backtracking on all of that," said Joe Weinert, senior vice president of Spectrum Gaming Group in Linwood.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy in Summit, Union County, meanwhile said the casino was making its no-smoking policy a scapegoat to explain its poor performance. She urged the casino to heavily promote its smoke-free environment and make the most of it.

We are disappointed that a no-smoking casino apparently couldn't last here. Arguably, Revel could have promoted its smoke-free policy better. But the struggling casino is now in a position that requires it to try everything. Regrettably - for the nonsmoking public and, most of all, for Revel's employees - that includes allowing smoking.

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