

Idea of smoke-free beaches is wafting to South Jersey

By **STEVEN LEMONGELLO, Staff Writer** |
Posted: **Thursday, August 22, 2013 12:00 pm**

A cool sea breeze may be blowing it away, so you may not notice it at first. But soon, you sense something in the air, something unexpected on a clean, open beach: smoke, from the cigar or cigarette of someone a few feet away.

Of course, smokers claim that the freedom to light up is an integral part of their traditional day at the beach. But as beach smoking bans become more and more common, will lighting up by the water become a thing of the past?

Several shore towns in northern New Jersey have banned smoking on beaches; they include Long Branch, Belmar and Ocean Grove. But now the trend of smoke-free beaches has gone south, with several Long Beach Island communities passing bans this year. Cape May Point is also looking into the idea, and a proposed bill in Trenton would ban smoking at all state beaches, including Corson's Inlet and Cape May Lighthouse state parks.

The bill, introduced in June and still in committee, was introduced by state Sen. Dawn Marie Addiego and Assemblyman Christopher J. Brown (R-Burlington, Camden, Atlantic), would ban smoking at outdoor public gathering places, "including state parks, beaches and wildlife management areas, and at recreation and conservation areas acquired or developed using state funds." "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 down-wind from smokers and exposing their family to second-hand smoke."

That seems to be the reasoning behind the new smoking bans on some Long Beach Island beaches — including one, in Harvey Cedars, which is so new that the signs informing beachgoers haven't arrived yet. "It was just enacted in August, but we currently don't have the signage," explained Harvey Cedars City Clerk Dinah Dale of the new ordinance, which bans smoking on ocean beaches during lifeguard hours. "We ordered them, but they didn't come yet, so we can't enforce it (yet)."

Harvey Cedars Mayor Jonathan Oldham said that "over the years, a number of people have come in and complained. We didn't feel (it was right) at that time, although it was something we were interested in doing. It's a big area to monitor. But Ship Bottom reached out to us first, suggesting it was one of the things they were looking into, and wondered if we would go along." As far as enforcement,

"People will enforce themselves," Oldham said. "In today's society, there's a place to smoke and a place not to smoke."

In Ship Bottom, the implementation of the beach smoking ban during its first summer has gone smoothly, said Chief of Lifeguards Keith Stokes. "All we're asking people to do is to smoke somewhere outside the swimming area," Stokes said. "Lifeguards' primary area of responsibility is the waterfront, but they can (check) when they're walking to work or when they go on their lunchbreak, or when they're cruising by on ATVs they stop and say, 'You have to move outside the swimming area.' We haven't really run into anyone who was uncooperative." The ban, Stokes said, "is health-conscious, especially for little ones. You don't want to be blasted with someone's second-hand smoke when you're just sitting on the beach enjoying it with your family."

Add that to smoking bans on local bay beaches such as the ones in Somers Point and Lower Township, including the popular Sunset Beach, and the trend is clear, said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of New Jersey Global Advisers on Smokefree Policy (or, fittingly, GASP).

"The future is definitely with smoke-free parks and beaches," Blumenfeld said. "One or two towns a week are passing smoke-free ordinances. The majority of municipalities in the state are land-locked, but the ones that do have beaches are no longer exempting them."

One reason for the increased number of bans in Monmouth and Ocean County, she said, was the fact that many residents are used to the strict anti-smoking laws in New York City or Philadelphia, where they may have lived or worked. Another is that towns begin to emulate their neighbors, with whom they share beachfronts. "The perfect example is the communities on Long Beach Island," she said. "One decided to (create a ban), and their neighbors then moved forward."

But in South Jersey — and especially in the one city that allows indoor smoking — old habits die hard. "It's not a noticeable problem," said Atlantic City Beach Patrol Chief Rod Aluise of beach smoking. "We don't receive any complaints. If somebody smokes, I don't see it as a big problem. It's really not something on our radar here."

In neighboring Ventnor, "We haven't had any (discussion) at all about smoking," said Beach Patrol Captain Bill Howarth. "I know people smoke on the beach, but people don't sit on top of each other, and people are pretty nice about it. If somebody's smoking by (someone else), they ask them to move their chair — or, what they usually do, they move their own chair." Cigar smoke is another matter, Howarth said. "It really stinks up the air for some people. They really don't go for cigar smoke. ... But there's no laws against it. If you go and talk to people, people are very nice."

Even in family-oriented Cape May, a proposed beach smoking ban went nowhere in 2011, City Manager Bruce MacLeod said. "Individuals expressed their rights and freedom of choice to be able to smoke if they so desired," MacLeod said. "And there were concerns from the business community that placing restraints would have a negative impact on business. And the fact that the beach is generally an open-air atmosphere. Individuals could move around if they want to."

In Atlantic City, for example, Lucy Hauber of Mays Landing sat right by the water as she smoked — "I try not to smoke around people," she said — while Stephen Schmitt, of Riverton, Burlington County, also waded out into the surf before lighting up.

"Nobody ever verbalizes anything," Schmitt said. "I just get scowls. I try to move away and try to stay away from everybody. I know a lot of people are offended by smoking cigarettes."

Mike Fitzsimmons, of Richboro, Burlington County, said in Margate that he goes down to the water to smoke cigars. "If you ask me, I hate the smell," added his wife, Amy. "That's why I go down there," Mike explained.

There were some pro-ban beachgoers, however. Cindy Schlossberg, of Margate, said the whole beach there should be a smoke-free zone. "On the weekend, a guy was smoking a cigar a block away and you could still smell it," Schlossberg said. "It's pungent, powerful and unpleasant. And I don't understand how he didn't realize how far the smell travels."

Litter is another issue. Melanie Martin of Ventnor quit earlier this year, but when she smoked on the beach she would place butts and ashes in a plastic bag. Carla Franchina, visiting Atlantic City from outdoor-smoking-friendly Italy, uses a plastic bottle.

As Kathy Miller of Haddon Heights put it simply: "No butts on the beach." In the end, said Howarth, "Long Beach Island is a completely different area up there. We had casino (smoking) bans, remember that? ... In wide open spaces, there's plenty of room for everybody."

http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/breaking/idea-of-smoke-free-beaches-is-wafting-to-south-jersey/article_1863be46-0b35-11e3-b312-0019bb2963f4.html

Contact Steven Lemongello:

609-272-7275

SLemongello@pressofac.com

Follow Steven Lemongello on Twitter @SteveLemongello