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# Smoking ban at N.J. beaches, public parks is lawmaker's goal

by [Trish Graber](#)/Statehouse Bureau

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TRENTON - Three years after New Jerseyans were banned from smoking indoors, a top state lawmaker wants to keep them from lighting up in many outdoor spots as well.

Smoking would be prohibited on beaches and in public parks under a proposal that could be taken up by year's end.



AP

"It's moved beyond a nuisance to a health hazard," said Sen. Barbara Buono (D-Middlesex), who plans to introduce a bill when the Legislature returns, likely in November.

The push follows a similar proposal this week by New York City's health commissioner and comes amid a national debate over the cost of health care. In launching her proposal today, Buono cited studies showing that secondhand smoke can cause health problems, even if the smoker's outside.

For example, a child who is outdoors with a smoking parent can experience significant exposure, a Stanford University study found. It also showed that even short-term exposure to outdoor smoke for people at risk of, or who have, heart disease could be "life-threatening."

"Parks and beaches are places that people go with children in order to breathe the fresh air and to exercise," Buono said.

Smokers "don't have a right to impose these health risks on the nonsmoking public," she added.

New Jersey's indoor smoking ban -- prohibiting cigar, pipe and cigarette smoking in virtually all enclosed public places -- took effect in April 2006. Since then, towns across New Jersey have placed "No Smoking"

signs on portions of beaches, in parks and on playgrounds, according to GASP, a Summit-based nonprofit group advocating for smoke-free air.

"It doesn't surprise me ... that this would be the next step," said Karen Blumenfeld, GASP executive director.

Belmar, one of the towns with a boardwalk and beach that is smoke-free, has imposed a \$25 fine for violations. Officials say there have been no problems with compliance. The borough has courtesy smoking areas on both sites.

"It's just part of the overall attitude change with smokers," Mayor Ken Pringle said. "I also think it's important that you provide a place where smokers do have a cigarette."



Tim Farrell/The Star-Ledger

Buono, shown here in June, says smoking has gone from a "nuisance to a health hazard."

In nearby Bradley Beach, officials have banned smoking on one of the borough's beaches, and Mayor Julie Schreck, who says she fully supports Buono's proposal, is fighting to tighten restrictions in the areas where smokers are allowed to puff freely. "I don't know how it became a right to waft toxic smoke into other people's nasal passages," she said. "Correction, I do know. A powerful and wealthy industry lobby convinced us that this is a right."

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Both mayors believe curtailing smoking would help local businesses, and Pringle said restrictions in Belmar have helped curb summer revenue loss during a beach season that was largely considered a washout. Gov. Jon Corzine said he would have to study the proposed legislation before deciding whether to support it, but has favored similar measures in the past.

"I'm generally in favor of banning smoking in public places," Corzine said today during a transportation news conference on the Garden State Parkway.

Senate President Richard Codey (D-Essex), who as acting governor signed the indoor smoking ban, said he is open to the idea.

"I think we can, at the very least, have a discussion about it and get a feel for how the membership feels about it," he said.

New Jersey Sierra Club director Jeff Tittel said aside from the health benefits, an outdoor ban would reduce pollution of waterways and recreational areas.

"Too many times, people think the sand on the beach is an ashtray," Tittel said.

David Sutton, a spokesman for tobacco giant Philip Morris USA, said the company believes people should be able to avoid being around secondhand smoke, particularly in places where they must go -- such as public buildings, public transportation and many areas in the workplace.

"We maintain, however, that complete bans go too far," Sutton said. "We believe that smoking should be permitted outdoors except in very particular circumstances, such as outdoor areas primarily designed for children."

The fine for an individual or business violating the indoor smoking ban is at least \$250, with a \$500 penalty for the second violation and \$1,000 for each subsequent infraction. Buono said she has not decided on a fine for her proposal.

In New York City, Mayor Michael Bloomberg supports the idea of banning smoking in public parks and beaches, but he wants to study whether it could be successfully implemented, according to his spokesman, Jason Post.

--Staff writers Claire Heining and James Queally contributed to this report.