

Passaic County freeholders vote to ban smoking in county parks

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BY ZACH PATBERG

STAFF WRITER

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The Passaic County freeholders voted unanimously Tuesday to ban smoking in the county's dozen parks, putting the county in the vanguard of a growing statewide trend.

Supporters of the ban, which does not apply to the Preakness Valley Golf Course, said that prohibiting smoking would reduce secondhand smoke around children and litter in the parks. The county already leads the state in the number of towns with smoke-free municipal parks; 13 of 16 municipalities have approved such a ban.

"We think once people experience it, they'll like it," said Alan Kantz, program manager for Global Advisors on Smokefree Policies, or GASP, an advocacy group that has pushed for such laws across the state. "Here in Passaic County, we've seen all the pieces move into place."

Cindy Meakem of the Center For Prevention and Counseling — a group that focuses on curbing substance abuse — held up a water-cooler jug before the freeholders on Tuesday filled with cigarette butts that were collected in just an hour in Great Falls National Park in Paterson.

"If we don't engage the children in this, there's no sense in it," she said.

Passaic is one of four counties, along with Somerset, Union and Camden, that have approved bans on smoking in parks. More than 100 towns have done the same across the state, including Paterson in May and Cliffside Park on Monday. Bergen County has banned smoking at playgrounds, ball fields and swimming pools since 2004, though GASP Director Karen Blumenfeld said she "hopes to engage them in the future" about a more widespread ban.

The organization said that only 15 percent of New Jersey adults smoke. In August, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention launched a "Protecting Your Children from Tobacco" initiative to encourage communities to ban smoking in public places.

Passaic County Administrator Anthony De Nova said the decision was made to exempt the golf course because of expected resistance from golfers who like to smoke cigars.

"And it's a mostly older population," he said.

Email: patberg@northjersey.com

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