

Lawyer predicts more costly smoking lawsuits against casinos

By [Liz Benston](#)

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At an anti-smoking conference in Las Vegas this week, the lawyer behind one of the largest settlements against a casino for allowing smoking said similarly expensive lawsuits are likely as casino workers across the country seek his advice in pursuing complaints against their employers.

“Workers are finding the courage to come forward and potentially submit claims in New Jersey, Nevada, West Virginia and Louisiana,” said Jeffrey Carton of Meiselman, Denlea, Packman, Carton & Eberz P.C., a New York law firm that pursues complex class-action cases.

Carton represented Vincent Rennich, a casino pit boss who won a \$4.5 million settlement last year against the Tropicana in Atlantic City. Rennich, a nonsmoker, was diagnosed with lung cancer at age 48 after 25 years at the Tropicana.

“I didn’t think I’d live to see 49, let alone 50,” Rennich said at the inaugural National Smokefree Gaming Symposium. For years, Rennich said he collected newspaper clippings of Atlantic City casino workers who had died young of lung or heart problems — complications he believed were linked to smoky casinos.

Rennich said he joined a small exodus of Atlantic City casino workers who went to neighboring Delaware, which has banned smoking in businesses including casinos, bars and restaurants.

Delaware casinos reported business declines after a smoking ban passed in 2002 but business has increased since then.

Rennich began work at Dover Downs about a year ago. The casino’s table games business is good, he said, and gamblers appreciate the smoke-free environment.

“(Smoking) is not an issue. People go outside if they want to smoke.”

It’s unclear whether suits like Rennich’s will force casinos to ban smoking, the hope of anti-smoking advocates attending this week’s conference.

Under pressure from casino workers who rallied around Rennich, Atlantic City’s city council banned smoking but

reversed itself after casinos complained the move would hurt business.

Casino bosses dislike the prospect of forcing customers to take a smoke break because they fear that gamblers will second-guess losses and not return to the tables — or take their winnings and leave, Rennich said.

A smoking prohibition may be even harder for Las Vegas casinos to stomach, he said, because the town is marketed as a place to escape and indulge.

“You can’t put a price on your health,” he said. “I was 22 when I started in the business. I knew cigarettes could kill. I never knew they could kill me.”

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