

# Atlantic City bans smoking on casino floors

by The Associated Press

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Capping a battle that lasted more than a year, the Atlantic City Council voted 9-0 today to end the last major loophole to a tough statewide ban on smoking in public buildings that had conspicuously exempted gambling halls.

As a result, smoking will be prohibited on the gambling floor at all 11 Atlantic City casinos as of Oct. 15. But patrons will still be able to light up in unstaffed smoking lounges away from the table games and slot machines, if the individual casinos choose to build them.

Casino workers -- many wearing T-shirts with the slogan "Nobody deserves to work in an ashtray" -- burst into sustained applause when the votes were counted and chanted "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

"The employees of Atlantic City's casinos have hit a jackpot of their own tonight," said Dr. Arnold M. Baskies, chief medical officer for the American Cancer Society in New Jersey and New York. "Hardworking casino employees have been keeping Atlantic City's multibillion dollar casino industry on a roll, but have been gambling with their lives for far too long."

Mayor Scott Evans said he would sign the ordinance within 10 days.

"We're going to save lives with this," he said. "People are going to be able to come here and enjoy a nice, smoke-free environment."

More than two dozen states nationwide regulate smoking inside casinos, eight ban smoking altogether inside the gambling halls, and two others will impose a total ban starting in 2009, according to Karen Blumenfeld, policy director of the New Jersey Group Against Smoking Pollution.

In January 2007, Atlantic City tried to pass its own law banning smoking in the casinos, but backed down under withering pressure from the casino industry, which claimed the measure could cost them 20 percent of their revenue and mean the loss of as many as 3,400 jobs. The City Council then enacted a compromise law restricting smoking to no more than 25 percent of the casino floor.

But that hasn't worked. The smoking areas are still not walled-off and separated from nonsmoking areas, as last year's law had called for, and smoke still wafts throughout the casino floor. Smokers still feel persecuted, and casinos still fret about losing business in an already bad economic climate, which is being worsened by the growing success of slots parlors in nearby Pennsylvania and New York.

Joe Corbo, president of the Casino Association of New Jersey, declined comment on the vote.

Kim Hoverman of Stone Creek in Cumberland County is a smoker who plans to take her business elsewhere.

"I don't think there should be separate areas," she said as she played a slot machine and puffed on a cigarette at the Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort. "I won't come here at all; I live closer to Philadelphia anyway. And I hate smoking outside."

But Kim Hesse, a Caesars dealer and smoking opponent, predicts people like McGuigan will be the minority.

"There are lots more nonsmokers than smokers," she said. "I see it every day at my table; I'd say it's about 80-20 in favor of non-smokers."