

Smoking ban for Atlantic City casinos delayed; Nevada casino goes smoke-free

By [Liz Benston](#)

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Arguing that a smoking ban would further hurt earnings that have slumped in the downward economy, Atlantic City casinos successfully lobbied Atlantic City's city council to delay a complete smoking ban that would have taken effect Oct. 15.

The council today voted 5-4 in favor of delaying the ban. An ordinance delaying the ban faces a second reading Oct. 22, though a final decision might be extended. If approved, the delay could last up to a year -- or at least until the economy begins to rebound.

Atlantic City casinos have been operating under a partial ban that allows smoking on up to 25 percent of their casino floors. Casinos were initially exempted from state legislation in 2006 that banned smoking in public workplaces.

The delay angered casino workers and advocates who attended the meeting this evening.

"This isn't about the economy. The casinos are using that as an excuse for their own corporate greed," said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of New Jersey GASP, an anti-smoking advocacy group that lobbied for the ban.

After the council approved a complete smoking ban in April, several Atlantic City casinos began constructing enclosed smoking lounges, which are allowed under the ban.

The casino industry says that smoking bans cost them millions of dollars in lost revenue as customers seek smoker-friendly casinos in other states.

Meanwhile, anti-smoking advocates are going state by state, seeking bans they say will level the playing field.

Also today, Nevada regulators gave preliminary approval to license what could become the state's first new casino to ban smoking.

It's a small casino in Fernley, population 19,700. Fernley, 30 minutes from Reno, has the distinction of being one of the state's fastest growing cities and is home to an Amazon.com fulfillment center, among other warehouse employers.

The Fernley Nugget will open Nov. 1 with 120 slot machines, a diner and an outdoor patio for smokers.

The decision to operate a smoke-free casino was done on principle, owner and general manager David Scott Tate told the Gaming Control Board today.

Tate acknowledged that the ban might put his property at a competitive disadvantage but said he wouldn't remove the smoking ban if revenue takes a hit. Tate has operated small casinos in Nevada for more than a decade.

The property has received more than 100 applications from employees who are excited about working at a smoke-

free property, while only one applicant was unhappy about the ban, Tate said.

A handful of Nevada casinos have attempted to ban smoking as a marketing ploy to boost flagging performance. Those bans generally didn't help business, though several casinos now offer either nonsmoking games or areas.

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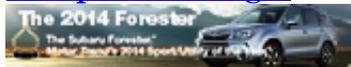
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