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Atlantic City Tightens Curb on Smoking

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTIC CITY (AP) — Ending a battle of more than a year, the City Council voted unanimously on Wednesday to ban smoking on the gambling floor at all 11 Atlantic City casinos, starting on Oct. 15.

In a 9-to-0 vote, the Council did away with the last major loophole to a tough statewide ban on smoking in public buildings that had exempted gambling halls.

But patrons will still be able to light up in smoking lounges away from the gambling tables 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.

“Hard-working 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,” Dr. Baskies said.

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 in casinos, eight ban smoking altogether in 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 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 has not worked. The smoking areas are still not walled off and separated from nonsmoking areas, as last year's law ordered, and smoke still wafts throughout the casino floor. Smokers feel persecuted, and casinos fret about losing business in an already bad economic climate, which is being worsened by the growing success of slot machine parlors in nearby Pennsylvania and New York.

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

Kim Hesse, a Caesars dealer and opponent of smoking, predicts that when the ban takes effect there will be some drop-off in the number of smokers who come to gamble, but she feels it will be insignificant.

“Think back just a few years ago: You could smoke in malls, you could smoke in restaurants, you could even smoke in hospitals,” she said. “Now you can't, and it's become the norm. People are used to it. “