

Princeton may ban outdoor smoking

Nora Muchanic, Reporter, ABC6 Action News, WPVI-TV Philadelphia, 6:42pm

PRINCETON, N.J. - March 19, 2013 (WPVI) -- Princeton Township could be on the verge of banning all outdoor smoking on town property and it could happen tonight.

Princeton led the way back in 2000 banning smoking in public places and is now poised to expand the ban to the outdoors, including all municipal property like buildings, parks, and pools.

The effort is being led by Councilwoman Heather Howard, a former New Jersey health commissioner.

"You shouldn't have to be subject to secondhand smoke. There's increasing research about the dangers of secondhand smoke especially on young kids. So the idea of making our parks and public areas smoke free is a really important step we can take to promote public health," Howard said.

Reaction to the proposal is mostly favorable.

"I think it's a great idea. I'm a non-smoker, a reformed smoker, I'm very sensitive to it," Terry Bingert of Lawrenceville, NJ said.

Barbara Bickford, a grandmother visiting from New Hampshire, agrees. "Oh, it's a health hazard. The kids get exposed to it, the lungs go, it's just not good for you," Bickford said.

"If I'm out at a game I just want to enjoy it without breathing it in and not being annoyed," Megan Rafter of Longport, NJ said.

But others Action News talked with think banning smoking in the outdoors at parks and pools goes too far.

"I understand that if the smoke's too close to somebody it could bother them, but especially if you're in an open area or a private place, people should have the right to do what they want," Paul Dildarian of East Brunswick, NJ said.

Over 160 towns throughout New Jersey have similar bans. Local health inspectors and Princeton police would be in charge of issuing tickets and enforcing the ban. There's a \$250 fine for violators, but officials say this isn't about bringing in revenue. What they really want to do is change behavior.

"We know that smoking is the number one preventable cause of death so we ought to be doing more to protect people," Howard said.

The ban would take effect 20 days after it's approved and won't cost the town a cent because the American Cancer Society says it will pay for no smoking signs. The Board of Health meets tonight at 7.30.

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