

## EDITORIAL: Extend beach, boardwalk smoking ban to all towns

May 13, 2014

mycentraljersey.com

Visitors to Belmar this summer will be able to enjoy the sun, sand and surf without choking on tobacco smoke. The Borough Council voted last week to snuff out smoking on the town's entire beach and boardwalk. The new ordinance, complete with \$25 fines, goes into effect by Memorial Day weekend.

There are quite a few reasons to commend this and other communities for similar actions — and not one reason to object to it. Belmar should be applauded for this action, as it now joins at least 18 other towns in the state, and several at the Jersey Shore, such as Seaside Park and Seaside Heights, that have banned smoking completely on their beaches. Seaside Park bans smoking on its boardwalk as well.

The state Legislature should now pass a pending bill that would virtually eliminate outdoor smoking on beaches and parks throughout the state.

Obviously, it is a health issue. In an open-air environment, too many people are subjected unnecessarily to damaging second-hand smoke. And even after the smokers have left the immediate area, they leave evidence in the form of cigarette butts.

Gone now in Belmar is the previous compromise with smokers, which permitted smoking at the borough's beachfront at designated areas only. That simply did not work, since wind-blown smoke is unable to recognize boundaries. Belmar's new ordinance is a year-round prohibition. It does not include electronic cigarettes or the borough's Shark River beach.

Smokers will continue to grouse (or wheeze, as the case may be) about this growing infringement of their rights. Yes, smoking is legal, but no right is without limits. As the legal adage goes, "Your right to wave your fist in the air ends where my nose begins." That goes for smoking in public as well.

While it is heartening to see beach town after beach town banning public smoking, a proposed state law would make such piecemeal municipal action unnecessary. We support the proposed statewide ban working its way through Trenton. A bill that would ban smoking on all public beaches and parks passed the state Assembly in March by an overwhelming majority, paving the way for the possibility of smoke-free outdoor areas across much of New Jersey. Smokers would face fines ranging from \$250 to \$1,000.

The bill is now in the state Senate, where it sits in the Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee. It shouldn't sit there much longer. The full Senate should have a chance to pass the bill and the governor should sign it into law.

The tide is turning against public smoking. The state already bans smoking in indoor public places. At least 220 of New Jersey's 565 towns already ban smoking in parks. The current bill, banning smoking in all parks and beaches run by the state, counties or towns, is a logical next step.