

Herald News: Passaic smoking ban a healthy choice

FRIDAY, JULY 20, 2012
HERALD NEWS

AT LAST, a fine we can get behind from the city of Passaic. The City Council wisely passed an ordinance this week forbidding smoking in any city-owned buildings, in any city parks and at any recreational facilities. Violators will face steep penalties, ranging from \$250 for the first offense to \$1,000 for the third and subsequent offenses, Staff Writer Richard Cowen reports.

Passaic has lately embraced fines and fees with all the vigor of the newly converted. There were proposed fees for waiters and waitresses to pay for their own criminal background checks. Fortunately, those met such stiff resistance they weren't implemented. Neither were the emergency response fees for putting out building fires. But the city did raise or impose recreation fees, fees for fire alarm permits, fees for responding to car accidents and a new annual fee for reserving handicapped parking spaces outside homes, among others.

We understand Passaic is having a tough time of it financially and is looking to bring in money where it can. However, we don't agree with using the residents in this mostly low-income city as a municipal ATM. Unless it's for the greater good.

Banning smoking in public places is definitely for the greater good. And certainly is not a new concept. The city of Passaic joins 11 other Passaic County municipalities, including Clifton, Hawthorne, Paterson, Woodland Park and West Milford. The remaining four towns should pass their own no-smoking ordinances right away.

We all know the dangers of second-hand smoke: that your lungs do not distinguish between the smoke coming from someone else's cigarette and the smoke coming from yours. More insidious is the message learned by kids, who are already the favorite target of cigarette companies — reports suggest some companies target kids as young as 13. Seeing adults smoke tells children that whatever the warnings grown-ups give about smoking, it really is OK, because there the grown-ups are — at City Hall, the park or the pool — puffing away and having fun.

And as to the environmental impact of non-biodegradable, toxic cigarette butts, which get swept into sewers and tossed onto beaches, we have just one fact: Experts estimate that worldwide more than 1 billion pounds of cigarette butts become litter each year.

A hefty fine on smokers who light up in municipal spaces is the way to go. Because paying a \$250 penalty is hard to forget. That should put a damper on doing it again. But this fine will only work if it is rigorously enforced. It should be. For the safety and good health of Passaic.

http://www.northjersey.com/news/opinions/163143546_Passaic_smoking_ban_is_healthy_choice.html