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## **Ban smoking at NJ parks, beaches: Editorial**

By **Star-Ledger Editorial Board**

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Pardon the insensitive pun, but smoking is a dying habit. Experts now predict **Americans will eradicate cigarette smoking by 2050**.

New Jersey banned indoor smoking, in places such as bars and restaurants, in 2006. Outdoor spaces are the next logical frontier. Given our growing awareness of smoking's health risks, and its shrinking popularity among people of all ages, the outdoor smoking ban is a step whose time has arrived.

Yesterday, **a state Assembly committee advanced a bill to outlaw smoking in parks and on beaches** and to back it with steep fines, starting at \$250 for a first offense. When the same ban was proposed four years ago, it never got a hearing. At a hearing held Thursday, no one appeared to testify against it. That's a telling turnabout.

Nationwide, indoor smoking bans have cemented smoking's status as a social ill. Start puffing on a sidewalk, and people will sneer as if you had spit on their shoes. Deservedly so.

Smokers' pariah status — along with a growing body of knowledge about the dangers of first- and second-hand smoke — is driving more and more people to quit. Smoking rates are dropping among all age groups. Meanwhile, taxes are making an unpopular habit increasingly unaffordable. With tobacco-sellers such as **CVS getting out of the business**, and states (including New Jersey) thinking about **raising the tobacco-buying age to 21**, cigarettes will soon be harder to get, as well.

An outdoor ban has another attractive side effect: less litter. Who remembers picking cigarette butts out of their sand castles during summertime trips down the Shore?

**In New Jersey, 220 municipalities already ban smoking in parks;** 14 ban smoking on beaches. Momentum isn't on tobacco's side.

Banning smoking in public places — even outdoors — is a reasonable next move. Eight years after indoor smoking was stamped out, the time for New Jersey's outdoor smoking ban has come.

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