

http://blog.nj.com/njv_editorial_page/2011/06/post_59.html

Let's hope Revel isn't just blowing smoke

Published: Wednesday, June 22, 2011, 6:40 AM

For years, the casino industry (and elected officials who did its bidding) insisted that gambling and smoking go together. A smoking ban, they warned, would be catastrophic. It would kill the casinos.

Killing people, apparently, didn't bother them, however.

So hypocritical state legislators — who banned smoking in the Statehouse, of course, and most other public places — carved casino exemptions into the state's 2007 Smoke-Free Air Act. Local officials caved to casino industry pressure, too, even though they knew what we all know: Smoking kills.

When Atlantic City tried (unsuccessfully) to override the state exemption and ban smoking in casinos in 2009, one councilman thundered: "Gaming is about smoking, drinking and gambling. It goes together. It's all sin."

Actually, the sin was in that lie. Only 14 percent of the people in New Jersey smoke, and a 2008 survey conducted by the Atlantic City Convention and Visitors Authority revealed that only 23 percent of the city's casino customers smoke.

Now, a rogue casino might do what lawmakers haven't had the guts to do: Eliminate smoking in the casinos.

We can only hope.

Kevin DeSanctis, CEO of Revel, which will open in May 2012, says his \$2.4 billion casino probably will be smoke-free. DeSanctis says going smokeless "scares me," because he is worried about alienating even a small percentage of gamblers at a time when the industry is struggling.

But DeSanctis is smart, too. Revel is acknowledging the public's desire for smoke-free environments, and the casino will offer something other casinos don't: fresh air. It's a savvy business plan — arriving just as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration released nine graphic warning labels that will appear on all packs of cigarettes by no later than September 2012.

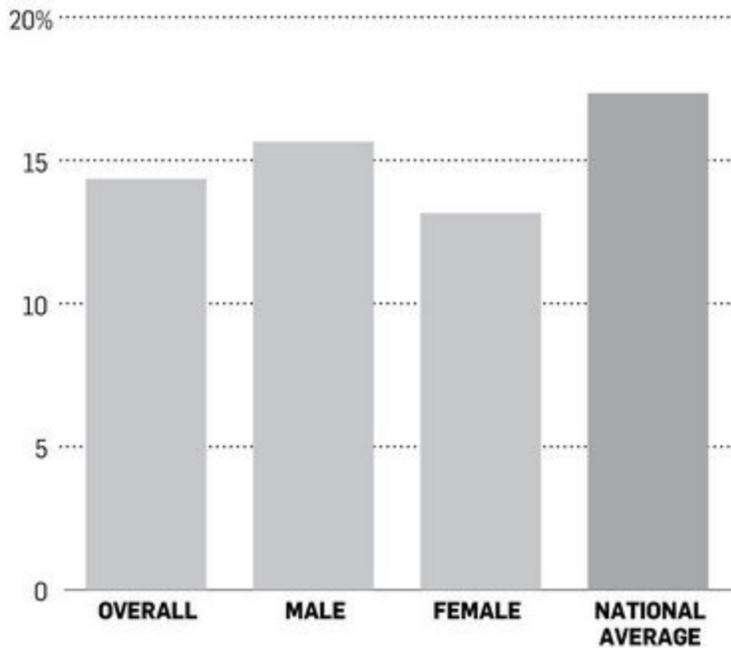
Atlantic City law restricts smoking to 25 percent of casino floors, but the casinos have been lax in their enforcement. Smokers puff away in nonsmoking areas. Partitions and air filters don't work.

This isn't just about gamblers. Many dealers work full weeks in smoking areas, and smoking area jobs are not voluntary. Casino workers predict Revel will be swamped with résumés and applications. If successful, Revel could entice other casinos to ban smoking, and we won't have to hear from the nanny-state whiners or gaming executives.

Because if smoking is driven from the casinos, it will have been done by the free market.

Lighting up, snuffing out

Cigarette use in New Jersey (2010)



N.J. legislation banning indoor smoking (2011):

- Government work sites
- Private work sites
- Restaurants
- Commercial day care centers
- Home-based day care centers

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
THE STAR-LEDGER