

The Reporter

NJ Weighs Smoking Ban at Beaches and Parks

Wayne Parry, Associated Press

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TRENTON, N.J. (AP) - New Jersey lawmakers are considering a bill that would ban smoking at all public beaches and parks in the state.

A state Assembly committee advanced the proposal at a hearing Thursday morning. It now goes to the full Assembly, where a final vote has not been scheduled.

The bill is designed to eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke at beaches and parks, cut down on litter and improve fire safety in those public areas. Smoking would still be allowed in parking lots near beaches and parks.

Violators would get fined \$250 for a first offense, \$500 for a second offense and \$1,000 for subsequent ones.

"When you look at our public parks and beaches, we do not want people to experience secondhand smoke, or increase the litter of cigarette butts," said Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri-Huttle, one of the bill's sponsors. "This enhances our beaches. I think it promotes more tourism."

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, said more than a third of New Jersey's municipalities have laws on the books that restrict smoking in parks and recreational areas.

"We all know that there's no safe level of secondhand smoke at all," she said. "Secondhand smoke outdoors does affect people."

Blumenfeld said some beach towns already have banned smoking on their sands, including Seaside Park, Long Branch, and Sunset Beach in Cape May Point.

Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, said litter from smoking is a major problem on the state's beaches. During annual spring and fall beach cleanups done by volunteer groups, cigarette butts are among the most frequently found items of debris.

"We pick up tens of thousands of cigarette butts," he said. "Quite frankly, if you have a dirty beach filled with cigarette butts, it's not a place you want to come back to."

The bill would require the state's health and environmental protection departments to come up with rules to implement the smoking ban.

The state's Smokefree Air Act already prohibits outdoor smoking on any property where a school-sponsored activity occurs.

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