



Smoke-Free Beaches May Soon Become a Reality

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Eric Englund, Reporter

ericenglund@thesandpaper.net

While smokers will be able to light up on certain areas of beaches on LBI as well as in Barnegat Lighthouse State Park this summer, that could all change when next season rolls around, according to a bill recently passed in the Legislature. The legislation, which expands the New Jersey Smoke-Free Act, prohibits smoking at state parks and beaches, while municipal and county beaches would be able to ban smoking on all but 15 percent of the area.

“The bill first has to be signed by Gov. Christie,” said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policies. “After he signs it into law, it will go into effect in 180 days, and when that happens, all these areas will immediately become smoke-free. If towns or counties want to keep no more than 15 percent of their beach area for smoking, they have the option of passing an ordinance. But if they don’t, the beach will be smoke-free.”

Prime sponsors of the bill were Sens. Joseph Vitale (D-Middlesex) and Shirley Turner (D-Mercer) and Assemblywoman Valerie Huttle (D-Bergen).

In a statement, Huttle said, “Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the state and the nation, and tobacco smoke constitutes a substantial health hazard to the nonsmoking majority of the public. The prohibition of smoking at public parks and beaches would better preserve the natural assets of this state by reducing litter and increasing fire safety in those areas, while lessening exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke among the public.”

Offenders would face a \$250 fine for the first offense, \$500 for the second and \$1,000 for additional convictions.

“This law is nationally groundbreaking as New Jersey will become the first state in the United States to require that all state, county and local parks, recreation areas and beaches be 100 percent smoke-free,” said Blumenfeld. “It provides for consistent, uniform healthful environments from town to town. New Jersey is ready for a 100 percent smoke-free parks and recreation areas policy statewide. Almost 250 municipal or county jurisdictions in New

Jersey already have laws that restrict smoking in parks and recreational areas, covering 42 percent of all towns and counties in the state. Even beach towns like Belmar, Spring Lake, Seaside Park, Long Branch and Sunset Beach in Cape May County have made their beaches 100 percent smoke-free.”

For example, Barnegat Lighthouse State Park prohibits smoking in its public buildings.

“There is no smoking allowed inside any state public building, but outside of those buildings at Barnegat Lighthouse State Park, there is no ban,” said Larry Ragonese, spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Protection, which oversees the park. “We’re aware of the legislation, and if it becomes law, then we’ll consider how to deal with it at that time.”

Blumenfeld said incentives abound for communities looking to establish smoke-free environments.

“Towns with their own 100 percent smoke-free recreational areas are eligible for free signs from the state to help with enforcement,” she said. “One hundred percent smokefree parks and recreational areas also generate health, environmental and economic health benefits. It normalizes smokefree environments where children engage in recreational activities, reducing the likelihood they’ll start smoking.”

She said there is no safe level of secondhand smoke even outdoors, especially for children and seniors.

“Studies show outdoor smoke levels can be as high as indoor smoking-permitted locations,” said Blumenfeld. “Communities with 100 percent smoke-free parks policies also enhance their green sustainability plans and reduce preventable fires and tobacco litter, decreasing health maintenance costs.”

Last summer, Harvey Cedars instituted a no-smoking ban on its beaches between the flags.

“I think that was a fair way to handle it,” said Mayor Jonathan Oldham. “That’s the area where families and children are, and I don’t think people there want to breathe in someone else’s cigarette smoke. I know I wouldn’t.”

However, he said a completely smoke-free beach could create other problems.

“Then you’d have people congregating at the street ends for a smoke, and people living there would complain,” he said.

— **Eric Englund**

ericenglund@thesandpaper.net