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Englewood raises age limit to 21 to buy tobacco products

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Cindy Meakem, far right, who works at the Center for Prevention and Counseling in Newton, donated 36 customizable, tobacco-free signs to hang in city parks.

ENGLEWOOD - The city became the first New Jersey municipality to raise the age limit to purchase cigarettes and other tobacco products to curb teenage smoking.

With the new law, retailers are banned from selling tobacco products to anyone who is not at least 21 years old.

City council members also approved an ordinance during their July 29 meeting that limits smoking, including electronic cigarettes, in public buildings and parks.

Statewide, anyone under the age of 19 is prohibited from purchasing cigarettes. The State Senate passed a bill in June to raise the purchase age to 21, although the Assembly has not introduced a similar bill.

The city's Board of Health first brought the ordinance to the council after it passed two resolutions detailing the measures in April. Lisa Wisotsky, a board of

health trustee, presented the resolutions before the council on May 13.

"I'm really pleased the council voted for it," said Wisotsky about the age limit ordinance. "It's making it harder for teenagers to obtain cigarettes and nicotine products, thereby protecting their health and ultimately saving lives."

Approximately 90 percent of smokers begin before the age of 21, said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of New Jersey non-profit Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP).

"By having this particular age cutoff, we think that will help your young people keep tobacco free," said Blumenfeld.

Other surrounding towns and counties in recent years passed laws prohibiting anyone under 21 from purchasing tobacco products. New York City, Suffolk County, New York; Hawaii County, Hawaii and 26 towns in Massachusetts have all adopted ordinance placing the same limitation, said Blumenfeld.

Sri Lanka and Dubai, a city in the United Arab Emirates, also adopted similar policies overseas, said Blumenfeld.

Englewood is also the fourth town in the Northern Valley and the 39th municipality across the county to ban smoking in public areas, according to GASP.

First-time violators found smoking on public property will pay a \$250 fine. Second-time violators would pay a \$500 fine, with each subsequent offense costing \$1,000.

Cindy Meakem, who works at the Center for Prevention and Counseling in Newton, presented the council with 36 customizable, tobacco-free signs to hang in city parks. The signs were donated by the Department of Health and Senior Services, which provides the Center for Prevention and Counseling a grant through its Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program.

"We were hoping since two years that Englewood would do smoke-free parks," said Meakem. "It seemed once the Health Department got on board was when it moved, which was a great."

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