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Lawmakers want to restrict smoking at Jersey beaches, parks

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ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — New Jersey lawmakers are trying again to restrict smoking at public beaches and parks.

The state Legislature has reintroduced a bill that was vetoed by Republican Gov. Chris Christie in 2014. It would ban smoking at publicly owned beaches and parks but would enable municipalities to set aside 15 percent of the beach or park as a designated smoking area.

"This just makes sense," said Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle, a Bergen County Democrat.

The proposed law is designed to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke, litter and fire risks. Violators would be fined at least \$250 for a first offense, increasing to up to \$1,000 for repeated violations.

The bill doesn't clearly spell out who would enforce the law. It says: "The person having control of a ... public park or beach shall order any person smoking in violation of this act to comply with the provisions of this act." Left unclear is whether the bill expects lifeguards, police officers or someone else to enforce the law.

Vainieri Huttle said lifeguards or other public personnel could ask a patron to stop smoking or move to a designated area, and she predicted most will readily comply.

"I don't think anyone would continue to smoke then," she said. "The point is not to go out and make money from fines and penalties. It could just be, 'Please go to the Avenue A beach where smoking is allowed.' I don't anticipate anybody struggling with that."

Some smokers interviewed when the previous bill was pending said they objected to a ban on outdoor smoking.

In vetoing the bill in September 2014, Christie said, "I am not persuaded that a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all state ban on smoking in public parks and beaches is advisable at this time."

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of the New Jersey-based Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, said the bill aims to protect against the health risks of secondhand smoke.

"Secondhand smoke is a class A carcinogen, with no safe level of exposure, even outdoors," she said. "Outdoor school property is required to be smoke-free by state law, so this bill just extends that to other outdoor rec areas where youth gather. This should be a no-brainer for leadership, given that smoking is the No. 1 leading cause of preventable death."

Several shore towns already ban beach smoking, including Belmar, Lavallette and Long Branch.

Nationwide, more than 250 communities have enacted beach smoking bans, according to the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation.

The bill is to be considered by a state Assembly committee on Monday.

<http://www.northjersey.com/news/lawmakers-want-to-restrict-smoking-at-jersey-beaches-parks-1.1514901>