

Public smoking / Ban it everywhere

(Press of Atlantic city Editorial Board), Posted: Tuesday, February 25, 2014 12:01 am

There are several good - but admittedly controversial - reasons to ban smoking in public places.

Many, if not most, people find the smell of cigarette smoke, indoors or out, offensive.

Smokers respond that tobacco is a legal product and they have a "right" to smoke. But all rights have limits. And the presumed right to smoke, just like your right to swing your fist, stops at the next guy's nose.

Further, secondhand smoke is unhealthy as well as unpleasant. That is no longer debatable. The science is clear. Even brief exposure can trigger asthma attacks in some people.

Finally, smoking is particularly dangerous for smokers. And to the degree that bans on smoking in public places cause people to smoke less, or even quit, that's a public good.

As we noted, people will quibble with these assertions. We understand. "Nanny government" and all that.

But as a bill to ban smoking at public parks and beaches moves through the Legislature, it is important to note that one reason to support the ban is quibble-proof.

And that is the millions of cigarette butts left behind in public places by smokers. No one has the right to sully our shared places like that. It is, quite simply, no different from illegal dumping.

Every regular beachgoer has experienced it. You plop down your chair and settle in to enjoy the fresh salt air and ocean view - and you discover a little pile of butts in the sand left for you by some smoker. Please, smokers: Explain to us your "right" to do that.

Ever year when Clean Ocean Action conducts its annual beach cleanups, discarded butts are the most common item recovered. Some were left on the sand by beachgoers. Others were dropped in storm drains by smokers on public

streets and sidewalks and then flushed into the nearest body of water.

Even if cigarette smoke smelled like rose petals and were a magic health potion, the discarded butts alone would be reason enough to ban public smoking, in our opinion.

New Jersey law currently bans smoking in indoor public places and all workplaces (with casinos being the notable, and unfortunate, exception). A bill approved 7-0 last week by the Assembly Tourism and Gaming Committee would extend the ban to all public parks and beaches. Fines would range from \$250 to \$1,000.

Our only problem with the measure is that it doesn't go far enough. Why not ban smoking on all public streets and boardwalks, too? That would do even more to limit the litter problem that smokers thoughtlessly create. There are a lot of things you can't do on a public street. Smoking should be one of them.

http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/opinion/editorials/public-smoking-ban-it-everywhere/article_4ec2c430-c829-5488-9aee-4a46214b9308.html#.Uwz6q-AU10w.email