

Westwood to hear presentation on banning smoking in public parks

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Westwood is one of six municipalities in Bergen County seeking out additional information on a proposed policy to ban smoking in public parks.

Recently, local municipal alliance coordinators from throughout the county attended a joint presentation by the Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy [GASP] and the Bergen County Health Department on the environmental, economical and personal benefits of going smoke-free, according to GASP Executive Director Karen Blumenfeld.

As a result of that meeting, officials in Garfield, Palisades Park, North Arlington, Ridgewood, Wood-Ridge and Westwood are "actively considering" putting bans into effect, Blumenfeld said.

According to Blumenfeld, the Summit-based advocacy group and policy center "has been educating for decades" on the dangers of smoking but that "it's only been in the last 10 to 15 years" that its seen "an uptick in interest to have 100 percent smoke-free" public areas. The group's executive director attributes it to an increase in public health awareness about the dangers of secondhand smoke, as well as more emphasis on educating children on not beginning the habit.

"Ninety percent of people start smoking before the age of 18 - so it's important to create smoke-free environments," she said. "...Smoking is the number one cause of disease and death in the United States and globally, so it's very important to help people either not begin smoking or using tobacco, or to help them quit."

The executive director also spoke of the "economical and environmental" benefits associated with the policy, including reduced maintenance costs of parks, as well as limiting the threat that discarded cigarettes pose to pets that are walked in parks.

Of the 160 municipalities across the state that have restricted smoking in outdoor areas, 22 are located in Bergen County. Fifteen of those municipalities have 100 percent smoke-free policies, while the remainder prohibit smoking in one form or another.

Locally, River Vale enacted an ordinance in July 2003 banning the use of tobacco products in township-owned parks and recreation areas. A year later, Old Tappan prohibited smoking at recreational fields during borough-sponsored events.

In April 2009, [Oradell](#) adopted an ordinance disallowing smoking in any borough-owned parks, playgrounds or recreational facilities. Oradell's ordinance also prohibits smoking within 10 feet of any parks and chewing tobacco on the borough's synthetic fields.

The [Westwood](#) Mayor and Council will hear a presentation on the proposal by GASP sometime next month during a public meeting, according to Westwood Councilman Peter Grefrath.

Grefrath recalled the idea to prohibit lighting up in parks was raised "in the mid-2000s" but nothing ever came of it.

"I'd love to hear what they have to say," said Grefrath, who added that he has questions on the policy - particularly on if it's something that can be reasonably enforced by local police.

When asked if she's heard of any challenges with enforcement, Blumenfeld said, "Most people abide by the policy" provided that it's "100 percent seamless and as long as signs are posted."

"If it's not 100 percent, it makes it difficult to determine where people can or cannot smoke," she said.

She added that the state's Department of Health provides municipalities and counties that adopt smoke-free ordinances with corresponding metal signage to post in public places, which "allows for self-enforcement."

According to Alan Kantz of GASP, fines levied upon the violator typically escalate from \$50 or \$100 for the first offense to \$300 to \$500 for subsequent violations. Kantz also added that a municipality can opt to write a "small community service penalty" into the ordinance.

Blumenfeld said GASP is also working to present information "on the nuances of the Smoke-Free Air Act." The 2006 law banned smoking in indoor public places and workplaces, as well as in recreational facilities when a school-sponsored event is being held.

The executive director hopes state legislators will take a cue from the increasing number of municipalities and counties adopting smoke-free policies and ban the practice outright from all public recreational spaces throughout the state.

http://www.northjersey.com/news/191825021_Westwood_to_hear_presentation_on_banning_smoking_in_public_parks.html?page=all