



Statewide smoking ban needed in Illinois

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Illinois communities are leading the way, but it's time for the state to catch up. It's time for the state to ban indoor smoking in public places.

The Illinois Clean Indoor Air Act took effect in 1990, but it was full of holes.

Bars and bowling alleys were excluded from its coverage. Restaurants could designate smoking and non-smoking areas. Originally, most municipalities were barred from imposing restrictions.

All communities were given the power to impose smoking bans in a law that took effect Jan. 1, 2006. More recently, non-home-rule counties were given that authority, too.

Now, more than 40 Illinois communities and counties have smoking bans. They include Bloomington, Normal, Champaign, Urbana and Springfield.

But, as people in this area are well aware, the city-by-city approach leads to inconsistency and unequal playing fields. Many municipalities have spent a lot of time arguing about the finer points of smoking bans because the state has failed to act.

The strongest argument in support of a ban on smoking indoors in public places is the harmful effect of second-hand smoke.

U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona, in announcing the conclusions of a study, said last year, "The science is clear: Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance, but a serious health hazard that causes premature death and disease in children and nonsmoking adults."

The health-effects argument applies whether one is talking about the state level or local level.

Nearly half the states have smoking bans, although a handful of those do not include bars. New Jersey and Nevada include bars, but not the gambling floors of casinos.

Bills are pending in the state Senate and House to enact a comprehensive indoor smoking ban in Illinois.

House Bill 246, introduced by state Rep. Karen Yarbrough, D-Broadview, was approved by the House Environmental Health Committee. At last count, there were 29 co-sponsors — both Republicans and Democrats.

Senate Bill 500, introduced by state Sen. John Cullerton, D-Chicago, is awaiting committee action, Cullerton's measure has at least 10 co-sponsors, from both parties.

No Pantagraph-area lawmakers are among the co-sponsors of either bill even though smoking bans have been approved in the Twin Cities.

Health advocates estimate that only about 20 percent of adults in Illinois smoke.

Smoking is not a “right.” And causing others to breathe in your unhealthful secondhand smoke certainly is not a right.

Illinois should approve a comprehensive, statewide smoking ban.

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