

Alaska Dispatch News

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[Home](#) > Alaska is dying for a statewide smoke-free workplace policy

Michelle Sparck

April 4, 2014

We take our smoke-free air for granted, until it is in our face, or more disturbingly, in our children's faces. We all have a right to the expectation of smoke-free air.

My father, Harold Murray Sparck, was a natural resources consultant. From 1969 on, he worked tirelessly to build up the first grassroots environmental movement to represent Native interests as stakeholders in resource exploration and exploitation, namely for the Yup'ik / Cup'ik of the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, but also for other demographics of the coastal and interior areas of the state. With Nunam Kitlutsisti (Stewards of the Land), the Association of Village Council Presidents, the Bering Sea Fishermen's Association, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the State of Alaska and the Alaska Board of Fisheries, Alaska Board of Game, the Mink Festival, the Community Development Quotas, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, my father and many of his contemporaries subjected themselves to thousands of hours in meetings as engaged citizens and advocates. In those days, my father had to endure rooms full of secondhand smoke for as much as 10 hours a day in marathon meetings. He'd come home from a trip, and his luggage and clothing would reek of smoke.

Unable to shake a cough, my father got an X-ray, revealing both lungs riddled with tumors. This was only a few weeks after his 51st birthday. The doctors gave him two weeks to live. He rallied enough to settle his affairs, but he died 10 weeks after diagnosis. My father was not a smoker.

The state of Alaska currently does not have a strong smoke-free law. However, many communities have passed strong local laws. The City of Bethel was one of the first communities to opt for a smoke-free law, three years after his death, in 1998. Anchorage, Klawock and Haines Borough have passed 100 percent smoke-free laws that cover all workplaces, including all restaurants and bars. It is still too much that only half of Alaska's population is covered by a current smoke-free workplace law. No one should have to choose between their health and a good working environment.

We need legislation to combat this workplace threat. Secondhand smoke is a major cause of needless, preventable suffering and death. And it isn't only cancer we need to worry about; non-smokers exposed to secondhand smoke increase their risk of heart disease and lung cancer by up to 30 percent. Ventilation and other "air-cleaning" methods cannot scrub the damage that secondhand smoke causes. Comprehensive smoke-free workplace policies are the only effective way to eliminate secondhand

smoke exposure in the workplace. We know enough now about the dangers of smoking, and secondhand smoke, to do something about our workplace health.

Michelle Sparck lives in Bethel, Alaska, where she and her sisters manage ArXotica, an Arctic natural cosmetics company.

The views expressed here are the writer's own and are not necessarily endorsed by Alaska Dispatch, which welcomes a broad range of viewpoints. To submit a piece for consideration, e-mail [commentary\(at\)alaskadispatch.com](mailto:commentary@alaskadispatch.com) [1].

Source URL: <http://www.adn.com/article/20140404/alaska-dying-statewide-smoke-free-workplace-policy>

Links:

[1] <mailto:commentary@alaskadispatch.com>

Alaska Dispatch

News and voices from the Last Frontier

Published on *Alaska Dispatch* (<https://www.alaskadispatch.com>)

[Home](#) > Statewide workplace smoking ban looks to drum up support in Alaska

[Suzanna Caldwell](#) ^[1]

February 3, 2014

Main Image:

[Cigarette butts](#) ^[2]

Main Image Caption:

About half of Alaska residents are protected by workplace smoking bans, but a new movement hopes to get that up to 100 percent by increasing education efforts.

About half of Alaska's population lives in a community with a workplace smoking ban, but the other half doesn't. While that's a good sign for supporters of smoke-free workplaces in Alaska, there's been a push in recent years to make things even better for them.

That's why organizations like the American Lung Association and American Cancer Society are pushing for a statewide smoke-free workplace law in the 49th state.

Nationally, 30 states and the District of Columbia have statewide workplace smoking bans. In Alaska, roughly a dozen communities have bans of their own. The Municipality of Anchorage, home to about 300,000 people -- a little less than half of the state's population -- has a smoking ban. There's also one covering the 30,000 people who live in Juneau, the state capital. Even smaller communities like Bethel, Valdez, Unalakleet, Dillingham, Haines and Palmer have instituted bans ^[3] in recent years.

Those have been good first steps, but Emily Nenon, Alaska government relations director with the American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network, said that's about all most Alaska communities can do when it comes to smoking bans. While some smaller cities could institute bans under their city's charters, some of the state's most populated boroughs -- including the Fairbanks North Star, Matanuska-Susitna and Kenai Peninsula - do not have the power to manage public health. Without health powers, a borough cannot implement a ban.

"We've gotten about as far as we can get with the powers that they have," Nenon said.

That's creating a disparity. In the Mat-Su, for example, the city of Palmer has a ban, but the city only encompasses five square miles of the borough's 25,000 square miles. Businesses outside the city are welcome to allow to smoking under the current law, meaning customers don't have to travel far if they want to smoke.

But instituting health powers are a bit of a Catch-22 for borough assemblies. While they could decide to have health powers -- usually through voter referendum -- those can come with more responsibilities than simply a smoking ban, Nenon said.

"(Boroughs) are more interested in the state creating that level playing field," she said.

Plus, there's the entire unorganized borough, which consists of about 70,000 of the state's residents. While many communities in that borough have signed on as having smoke-free workplaces, most of the smaller ones have not.

So in an effort to get the law moving, the smoke-free Alaska campaign is looking to increase public awareness and drum up support.

At an Anchorage Chamber of Commerce Make It Monday luncheon in an effort to court support from Anchorage businesses, Nenon pointed out that American Cancer Society study found that Alaska would save \$5.04 million in treatment for lung cancer and heart illnesses due to smoking in the first five years of a statewide ban. Of that, half a million would be Medicaid savings.

Marge Stoneking, Alaska director of the American Lung Association in Anchorage, said studies show that when smoking bans are put in place, business either remains flat or increases. An Alaska Department of Health and Social Services [study in 2012](#) [4] found that one in five bar patrons in Anchorage and Juneau found themselves visiting bars more often once smoking bans were in place.

"It shows that businesses can be smoke-free without hurting the bottom line," she said.

So far, 350 businesses and community groups in Alaska have come out in support of the smoking ban.

While buzz is still building for the statewide effort -- and has been building for years -- no legislation has been introduced yet that would create a state ban.

Nenon thinks the reason may be that so many people live in communities with smoking bans is that they forget other places lack them. She encouraged people to contact their legislators or to sign a resolution of support for a smoke-free Alaska.

With all the studies noting the benefits of smoke-free workplaces, Nenon said the biggest issue moving forward will be making sure people understand the benefits of the law. Since Anchorage passed its smoking ban in 2007, she said, no tickets have been issued to violators. Incidents have been handled with simple phone calls or letters reminding people about how the law works.

"If the laws are well understood, enforcement is easy," she said.

Source URL: <https://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/20140203/statewide-workplace-smoking-ban-looks-drum-support-alaska>

Links:

[1] <https://www.alaskadispatch.com/authors/678505>

[2] <https://www.alaskadispatch.com/image/cigarette-butts>

[3] <http://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/palmer-goes-smoke-free-615-percent-voting-ban>

[4] http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Documents/Tobacco/PDF/2012_alaska_tobacco_facts.pdf

Alaska Dispatch

News and voices from the Last Frontier

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[Home](#) > 10 years in the making, smoke-free workplace bill reaches Alaska Legislature

Suzanna Caldwell ^[1]

March 25, 2014

Main Image:

No-smoking sign in bar ^[2]

Main Image Caption:

Workplace smoking bans are in effect in Alaska communities that comprise about half the state's population. Proponents of a statewide ban have a bill in the Legislature, but opponents have been vocal in their testimony against the proposed law.

For more than a decade, anti-smoking advocates have fought to make workplaces smoke-free. They started small, working at the local level, steadfastly bringing indoor smoking bans first to Bethel in 1998, and then slowly but surely to other communities in Alaska. In all those years, they've managed to cover about half of the state's population.

But advocates say they've done about all they can when it comes to regulating smoking at the local level, and now it's time to think bigger -- statewide big.

Tuesday the Alaska House Health and Social Services committee heard House Bill 360 -- sponsored by Anchorage Rep. Lindsey Holmes -- which would prohibit smoking in indoor workplaces. It's the furthest a statewide workplace smoking ban has made its way through the Legislature, something that in some ways has been intentional, according to Mike Gutierrez, Alaska grassroots relationship manager for the Alaska American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network.

"This is the first time we've felt like we had the ability to have a bill introduced, much less get one passed," he said.

It's been a slow build, focusing on education and getting smoking laws passed in individual Alaska communities. Since the first ban in Bethel, smaller communities like Valdez, Unalakleet, Dillingham, Haines and Palmer have passed them, as have larger ones -- including bans covering the 30,000 residents of the state's capital in Juneau, along with Anchorage, Alaska's largest city and home to about a third of the state's population.

But even with those bans, plenty of other Alaskans are not covered. Second-class boroughs, like the Matanuska-Susitna, Kenai Peninsula and Fairbanks North Star borough do not have health powers and cannot implement smoking bans borough-wide. The unorganized borough, which includes 70,000 Alaskans and communities like Dillingham, Unalaska and Cordova, also cannot enact a smoking ban. The Legislature is supposed to serve as the governing body for the borough, though such a meeting has never been held in more than 50 years of statehood. A statewide ban would cover those communities and "level the playing field," Gutierrez said.

Marge Stoneking, Alaska director of the American Lung Association, has been with the organization for the last 10 years and watched that slow and steady change towards greater acceptance of smoking bans.

She noted that the Anchorage ban, first passed in 2001 and again with a second, more comprehensive version in 2006, has really helped change attitudes in Alaska. That wasn't immediately clear, she said, until Anchorage residents turned down a voter initiative that would amend some of the more comprehensive elements of the law by an overwhelming majority (76 percent came out against the initiative). Stoneking said that turnout showed a marked change.

"That was huge in terms that people get it and (smoke-free workplaces) are important to them," she said.

She also noted that a University of Alaska Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research report found overwhelming support from local businesses in Anchorage that have gone smoke-free. It also noted that in the years since the ban, no citations have actually been written against the law. So far, more than 400 businesses across the state have signed pledges in support of smoke-free workplaces, from large corporations like Doyon Ltd. to smaller "mom and pop" stores.

"That's a good indication that this just is accepted," Stoneking said.

That's something that Holmes, the bill's sponsor, acknowledged. She called the bill the "take it outside" bill, and noted it only applies to workplaces and that as far as she can find, the law is mostly "self-policing."

"Which is the best kind, as far as I'm concerned," she said.

Opposition testimony strong

In the hearing, however, many citizens came out in opposition of the bill. Many were against the the inclusion of e-cigarettes in the bill, saying science has not shown whether the vapor devices are dangerous. Even before, owners of a smoke shop in Soldotna created a [YouTube video opposing](#) the Senate version of the bill.

Angela Carroll, owner of Glacier Vapors, an e-cigarette store in Palmer, said a big part of her business comes down to "try before you buy." If the law passes, it will undoubtedly affect her business.

"It will kill the shops," she testified. "Why not give vaping a chance?"

Dale Fox, the president and CEO of Alaska CHARR, the cabaret, hotel, restaurant and retail association, testified against the bill. He said a ban on smoking is essentially a ban on bars. People choose to go into bars, he said, and bars should be able to make the choice to have or not have smoking. He said while anti-smoking proponents have invested in ad campaigns saying non-smoking policies are good for business, he's heard that some establishments have lost up to 30 percent of their businesses when smoking bans are enacted.

"If legislators think less government is better, they will not vote for this bill," he said.

Citing the lateness in the day, the committee kept testimony open on the bill but cut it off after only a few Alaskans spoke, to continue on a later date.

Source URL: <https://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/20140325/10-years-making-smoke-free-workplace-bill-reaches-alaska-legislature>

Links:

[1] <https://www.alaskadispatch.com/authors/678505>

[2] <https://www.alaskadispatch.com/image/no-smoking-sign-bar>

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=NE7o7zJU3U

Alaskan 'Ghostwalker' speaks against smoking

Patterson hopes to speak in Juneau schools

Posted: November 18, 2014 - 12:04am

By STEPHANIE SHOR

JUNEAU EMPIRE

Michael Patterson, the self-proclaimed "Ghostwalker" of Juneau, continues to wage a battle against tobacco in his home state. He was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder, a form of emphysema, when he was only 44 years old.

Patterson works with the Alaska Native community as a relatable spokesperson for the Center for Disease Control's anti-smoking campaign. According to the American Lung Association, Alaska Native and American Indian youths have a 23 percent smoking rate, the highest in the country.

"When I made that commercial in New York, they said, 'You are going to save millions of lives,'" Patterson said. His 2012 commercial for the CDC's anti-smoking campaign gained national attention.

At the time of his diagnosis, doctors gave him five more years to live, he said. Patterson has survived two years past that mark. He calls himself a ghostwalker because he now lives on borrowed time.

Within the next year, he says he will need either a lung transplant, from which he might not recover, or a permanent oxygen tank.

In the last year, Patterson has lost 9 percent of his lung volume, and he says the downtown smoking situation is the culprit. He sees second-hand smoking as an unavoidable danger.

"I want to see smoking removed from the streets of Juneau," Patterson said.

He had planned to propose a ban on smoking in all public locations, both indoors and outdoors, at the next convention of the Alaska Tobacco Control Alliance, but they denied his request, in favor of a focus on smoke-free workplaces, he said. He still plans to breach the topic when he speaks at the summit.

Patterson said he worries for children picking cigarette butts off the street in a city which he calls a "smoke gauntlet." In response to the City and Borough of Juneau's proposed \$2 increase in tobacco sales tax, he said "kids are resourceful," and if smoking is allowed in public locations, they will find a way, despite the cost.

Since his election as the official spokesperson for the CDC, Patterson has dedicated the time he has left to visiting schools and communities across Alaska to fight what he calls "the code of silence."

Many youth growing up on the streets of Juneau are victims of abuse and never tell anyone, Patterson said. They live in silence, and cope in damaging ways, he said.

Patterson said using "shock treatment" on these kids through graphic images and shocking statistics, like he had in grade school, has minimal effects. Patterson began smoking when he was only nine years old.

"I would shut them out. Say it's none of their business and I am not hurting anyone but myself," he said.

After a recent speech at an elementary school, parents contacted Patterson about their children pointing to their hearts when they got home from school and telling the parents that when Patterson spoke, "they could feel it here."

One mother said her 9-year-old son told her, "Please stop smoking and I love you."

The motivational speaker, who often delivers speeches with tears running down his cheeks, said speaking from the heart is what really sways young people.

"If you shock me, I'll get over it. If you touch my heart, it will really have an affect on me long-term," he said.

His campaign has already led him to speak at schools in Kodiak, Sitka, Angoon, Hoonah and Pelican. He plans to speak at Yaakoosgé Daakahídi Alternative High School on Nov. 21 and hopes to be invited to other schools in the district.

"I know there are budget crunches," he said. He would be willing to waive the typical speaker fee and visit the schools for free. "I just need to be out there, sharing my story."

Patterson was asked recently to speak via webcast to a group of graduating students at the University of Washington School of Medicine by the Director of the CDC's office on smoking and health, Timothy McAfee.

Patterson was surprised to see over 100 students listening to his talk that day.

"When I asked if there were any questions (after the speech) there was dead silence for like two minutes," Patterson said.

Feeling embarrassed, he quickly closed his speech. McAfee thought this to be strange and later asked the facilitator what the medical students' reactions had been. The response came back that they were left speechless, a rare event.

This hit close to home for Patterson who was told by his first doctor upon diagnosis that he "only had emphysema, not cancer." Patterson continued to smoke after his diagnosis because he did not understand the significance of COPD, and didn't quit until he suffered his first attack and was placed on a breathing machine.

Patterson's own daughter recently lost her mother to lung cancer, and a non-smoking colleague from the CDC, Nathan Moose, died from the effects of second-hand smoke.

Patterson described a recent vision, in which a black mountain was crested with a large white mansion. The mansion represented the wealth and power of the tobacco companies, supported by dozens of coffins.

"My coffin has \$300,000 (spent on tobacco)," he said. "How much will yours have?"

The American Cancer Society will hold the 39th Annual Great American Smokeout on Thursday, in which smokers are encouraged to quit for one day.

•Reporter Stephanie Shor can be contacted at stephanie.shor@juneauempire.com or at (907) 523-2279.

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CLOSE X

E-cig users face new but familiar rule

Electronic cigarette use is now regulated

Posted: July 7, 2014 - 11:04pm

By KATIE MORITZ

JUNEAU EMPIRE

Juneau resident Todd Mace picked up electronic cigarette use about a year ago as a healthier option while he tried to kick a decade-long cigarette habit. Being able to take a couple puffs of his e-cigarette inside the bars kept him out of the lineup of smokers outside downtown bars — and away from temptation, he said.

But now Mace, along with Juneau's other e-cigarette smokers, must follow the same rules imposed on tobacco smokers — no smoking in bars, restaurants, bus stop shelters, city buildings and other public places.

The ordinance amending the city's pre-existing secondhand smoke control code to include e-cigarettes was adopted at a June 30 Assembly meeting. It puts into writing what some city institutions — including the Juneau School District and the Zach Gordon Youth Center — had already decided to do: put restrictions on a relatively new product that hasn't been addressed through legislation.

Robert Barr, director of the downtown library, was integral in getting something on e-cigarettes in the Juneau books. He said that since e-cigarettes became popular, he has had about six instances in which library patrons either asked if they could use an e-cigarette inside or just took one out and started puffing.

With e-cigarettes left out of the city's second-hand smoke control code, library staff couldn't legally say no, Barr said, and they couldn't do anything when other patrons complained about the vapor.

"We couldn't really address those complaints people were having," he said. "I asked the city attorney if that was something that fell under the city secondhand smoking code. It didn't seem appropriate to be using e-cigarettes in the libraries considering that the health effects seemed to be pretty real. We went forward from there."

He worked with city attorney Amy Mead for about two months until the ordinance was adopted, he said.

There are many opinions on the health effects of e-cigarettes, which are filled with a liquid combination of propylene glycol, water, flavoring, nicotine, and other chemicals that is then heated, vaporized and inhaled.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is not yet regulating the contents of e-cigarettes. The administration is currently taking public comment on the issue, however.

Barr pointed out that in October of last year, 41 of 50 states' attorneys general — including Alaska's — signed a letter to the FDA entreating it to begin regulating e-cigarettes.

"They're marketed as being safe products that can be used in public unlike tobacco," he said. "That's unfortunately not true."

Bob Urata, a physician with Valley Medical Care, spoke in favor of the ordinance during the public comment period at the June 30 Assembly meeting, according to meeting minutes. He called e-cigarettes "the new battle" now that lung cancer prevalence in Alaska is dropping. Urata said that although the FDA is still researching it, the aerosol inhaled and exhaled from e-cigarettes is "not benign" even if it isn't smoke, and contains toxins and carcinogens. If a product includes nicotine and is exhaled, it doesn't belong in a public building, he said.

Mace said he knows that e-cigarettes aren't healthy, but he feels so much better than he did when he was smoking a pack a day. He started using an e-cigarette about a year ago, and, a few months ago, stopped smoking cigarettes entirely.

"The last four months I stopped buying them, I stopped bumming them from friends," he said. "An alternative to help me quit smoking is why I bought (an e-cigarette)."

He said he's read article after article about the effects of e-cigarette use. It's hard to say what's fact and what isn't, but, regardless, he doesn't plan to be a lifetime user.

"Ultimately, I do want to quite smoking electronic cigarettes as well," he said.

Mace said he's disappointed he'll no longer be able to smoke inside at bars. That's the only public, indoor place he'd ever used it because "there's a certain etiquette" to e-cigarette use, he said.

"I don't walk around at Fred Meyer using it," he said. "I saw a guy in Wells Fargo setting up a new account, ... puffing away. Don't be disrespectful — don't be in the movie theater, don't be in the store."

Mace's smoking habit started years ago while drinking with friends at bars, and the temptation is still very real, he said. Keeping his distance from other smokers has helped him stay cigarette-free.

The appeal of the e-cigarette is "I don't have to be outside, I don't have to be around it, the temptation's not there," he said. "But what I'm going to do is just go outside and have my electronic cigarette."

Barr said he's pleased the ordinance passed, and library patrons will be, too. There isn't enough e-cigarette use in the library to merit putting up signs, he said, but anyone who breaks the new rules will be notified.

The ordinance was adopted without much discussion by the Assembly, which voted unanimously in favor.

"This was a pretty easy one," Barr said. "The assembly was interested in adding this in, and did so."

• Contact reporter Katie Moritz at 523-2294 or at katherine.moritz@juneauempire.com. Follow her on Twitter @katecmoritz.

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E-cigarette sellers take a page from Big Tobacco: Our view

The Editorial Board, 9:02 p.m. EDT April 17, 2014



(Photo: Resound Marketing via AP)

Just when smoking has finally lost its glamour, along come electronic cigarettes and an avalanche of sexy new ads that promote "vaping."

In one, actor [Stephen Dorff](http://www.ispot.tv/ad/76A2/blu-cigs-freedom-featuring-stephen-dorff) (<http://www.ispot.tv/ad/76A2/blu-cigs-freedom-featuring-stephen-dorff>), shirtless, talks about taking "back your freedom" while inhaling vapor on Lorillard's blu eCig. (Can anyone say Marlboro Man?) In another ad for blu, former Playboy centerfold [Jenny McCarthy leans forward seductively](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUJ5W2pz1Xl) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUJ5W2pz1Xl>) into the camera before saying: "I feel free to have one almost anywhere."

OPPOSING VIEW: [E-cigarettes can help end smoking \(/story/opinion/2014/04/17/e-cigarette-njoy-smoking-editorials-debates/7847587/\)](/story/opinion/2014/04/17/e-cigarette-njoy-smoking-editorials-debates/7847587/)

For a product whose main appeal is supposed to be that it's *not* a traditional cigarette, e-cigarette makers have sure taken a lot of pages from Big Tobacco's playbook. Which is not surprising. Many of the sellers are the same companies that made billions of dollars addicting people to [a product that kills 480,000 a year](https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0072.pdf) (<https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0072.pdf>).

The marketing push is enough to trouble anyone who believed that, after a half-century battle, the nation finally had smoking on the run and that fewer smokers would get hooked and die prematurely.

E-cigarettes — battery-operated nicotine inhalers that contain no tobacco — have the potential to help some smokers quit. But the jury is still out on whether and how well they may work. In the meantime, the potential for nicotine addiction is high, and there's no good reason to use e-cigarettes other than trying to quit smoking.

Federal law prohibits cigarette makers from sponsoring sports and entertainment events, handing out free samples and selling certain flavored cigarettes. TV ads were banned in 1970.

But for e-cigarettes, it's open season. Makers have sponsored music festivals, fashion shows and IndyCar racing. You can buy e-cigarettes or liquid refills in everything from Cherry Blast to Gummy Bear. Is the public really supposed to believe that e-cigarettes are not being marketed to minors?

The dangers of e-cigarettes may not be as obvious as those of traditional smokes, but new problems are emerging.

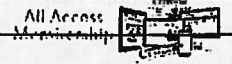
For example, the nicotine-laced liquid the devices use, which comes in small vials and large containers, can be toxic if touched or consumed. [Calls to poison control centers \(/story/news/nation/2014/03/25/e-cigarette-warning-from-poison-centers/6873759/\)](/story/news/nation/2014/03/25/e-cigarette-warning-from-poison-centers/6873759/) about misuse, mostly by children, have risen to 217 a month this year, almost 10 times the number in 2011.

Also troubling is that more [teenagers are experimenting with e-cigarettes \(/story/opinion/2013/09/22/e-cigarettes-smoking-addiction-editorials-debate/2850921/\)](/story/opinion/2013/09/22/e-cigarettes-smoking-addiction-editorials-debate/2850921/). In 2012, 1.8 million middle-school and high-school students tried them, double the number the year before. One in five of the middle-schoolers who experimented said they'd never smoked before. It doesn't help that about 20 states allow sales of e-cigarettes to minors.

So what's the right response? At least until more studies are done, all states should treat the new devices as they treat cigarettes, with bans on youth sales and indoor use. And the Food and Drug Administration, which has been slow to assert its authority to regulate e-cigarettes, ought to get on with it.

Independent research would determine if e-cigarettes really can help smokers quit. Or if they carry other health risks. For now, the nation ought to ensure that a new generation doesn't get hooked on a different and potentially dangerous product.

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Hospital CEO supports 'take it outside' legislation

Posted: March 6, 2014 - 9:40am

By Rick Davis

CEO, Central Peninsula Hospital

I have watched the smoke-free campaign make significant ground over the last several years. As a healthcare professional, I would be remiss if I didn't support a proposed law that would prohibit smoking in all indoor workplaces, businesses and public places. Of course the reason this legislation is being proposed is to prevent non-smokers from being exposed to second hand smoke. We now have plenty of science to support the fact that second hand smoke is dangerous. Just look up The Health Consequences of Smoking report. It's all there; I don't need to recite facts and figures as we all now know that smoking is a major threat to our public health.

I know we do things differently up here in Alaska and don't want or need anyone telling us what to do. Asking people to "take it outside" is a reasonable compromise to protect other people's health from the effects of second hand smoke. Much of Alaska has already adopted similar smoke-free laws but many areas remain in Alaska where they do not have health powers to enact such a law. The legislation introduced doesn't prohibit smokers from being hired or anything like that. They will just have to "take it outside" and away from an entrance or air intake.

We have enacted a smoke-free campus policy at our hospital and it was received well upon implementation. I suspect businesses that will be required to go smoke-free under the proposed legislation will enjoy the same results. People will thank you, just as they did at our hospital. This is not a Republican or Democrat issue, it's a health issue. Please support House Bill 360 and Senate Bill 209.

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CLOSE X

We have the best fresh air in the nation

Posted: Sunday, March 23, 2014 12:00 am

To the editor:

I can't express enough how nice it is to be able to breathe clean, smoke-free air in my town, thanks to our local smoke-free ordinance.

For the first time in 40 years we are now dining out in a couple of the local bars that have good food and clean air. I know they appreciate the extra business and I am spreading the word to my friends and customers about their new opportunities here in their own town. If you don't have to drive to the next town or all the way to the city for dinner, you just cut your carbon emissions — good for your health and the planet — and you just beefed up your local economy and saved time. Smoke-free is exponentially good for a healthy body and a healthy economy!

But what about e-cigarettes? They might seem innocuous as they are odorless and don't fill up ashtrays, but they do pollute the air for nonsmokers. If you sprayed fragrance-free hair spray in a public space you would be polluting the air around you with a barrage of chemicals that could cause an allergic reaction in some folks. E-cigarettes are much the same with the exception that studies have shown some to contain carcinogens and nicotine in their emissions. Without some form of regulation we have no way of knowing if the brand used by a patron is polluting our breathing space with these emissions. That kind of regulation is a federal issue.

We can help prevent this problem by establishing smoke-free regulations at the state level and set a standard for local legislation to follow.

No one wants to breathe in carcinogens. Nicotine? It's an addictive substance that people have a choice to burden themselves with. But the public air space belongs to people who have a choice not to breathe their pollution. Please consider regulations to treat e-cigarettes as we do tobacco-based cigarettes. If the state buildings are smoke-free, why shouldn't the state provide comprehensive regulations for a smoke-free Alaska? We have the best fresh air in the nation.

Brooke G. Heppinstall

Palmer

Lung health groups hoping to breathe fresh air into Alaska

By Weston Morrow wmorrow@newsminer.com | Posted: Monday, March 24, 2014 12:00 am

An earlier version of this article stated the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation was lobbying for the legislation when it is actually the organization's lobbying arm, Americans for Nonsmoker's Rights.

FAIRBANKS — The American Lung Association and Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights are teaming up in an effort to bring an end to second-hand smoke deaths.

The two organizations are cooperating to help push legislation through the state legislature that would ban smoking in commercial establishments throughout the state. Such prohibitions exist in certain municipalities already, such as Anchorage, but for the vast majority of the state, including Fairbanks, there is no sweeping ban.

Smoking is prohibited statewide in certain areas already, such as school grounds and in many workplaces, but not in restaurants and bars. The Lung Association and American's for Nonsmoker's Rights feel restaurants and bars should not be treated as exceptions to the workplace bans.

“We want to protect the health of everyone and think that everyone has the right to breathe smoke-free air, especially if you’re working indoors,” said Octavia Harris, health education manager for the Lung Association’s Fairbanks office.

The state legislation, HB 360 and SB 209, were both filed in their respective houses Feb. 26. The bills have support from both sides of the aisle, with cosponsors from each party, a positive sign for the legislation’s supporters.

The bill’s supporters claim to have the backing of more than 400 Alaska businesses and more than 75 Alaska Native groups.

Time is running short for the bill, however. The 28th legislature ends midway through April, and any bills not passed by then will have to be reintroduced and run through the legislative process in the 29th legislature. In the Senate, the bill sits in the state affairs committee awaiting a hearing. In the House, it was referred to the health and social services committee, where it is scheduled for a hearing at 3 p.m. Tuesday.

The Lung Association just recently opened a branch in Fairbanks in the fall. The organization has had a presence in Alaska for several years but previously only had its office in Anchorage.

Harris said that, for an area like Fairbanks North Star Borough, which doesn't have the authority to enact health requirements such as a smoking ban, the statewide law is especially important.

"A lot of people thought that we were already smoke-free in a lot of places and were surprised to find that there were a number of places that were not," Harris said.

Char Day, program manager for the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, said that she has to limit the places she can go in places like Fairbanks so as not to trigger her asthma.

"Normally, I don't have to worry about where I go, but here I have to be aware so much of where I go," Day said, "and it would just be wonderful to be able to go anywhere indoors in the state of Alaska and not worry about having an asthma attack."

Harris and Day said they don't believe the ban would be an intrusion on people's rights. They don't want to force anyone to stop smoking, they said, but to do so outside if they must smoke.

"It's about making a choice that is going to be best for everyone, not just one or two individuals," Harris said when asked if they felt it was reasonable to expect smokers to go outside in places like the Interior during winter.

"It's not about the smoker. It's about the smoke, and it's about simply asking them to take it outside."

Contact staff writer Weston Morrow at 459-7520. Follow him on Twitter:

@FDNMschools.

Supports statewide smoke-free workplace

Posted: Monday, March 24, 2014 11:59 pm

To the editor:

As a health practitioner in the Valley, I am in support of passage of a statewide smoke-free workplace law to protect all Alaskans from the dangers of secondhand smoke. This proposed bill is part of the current legislative session. According to the 2014 Surgeon General's report "The Health Consequences of Smoking," the science is clear. There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.

Those who choose to smoke do so freely and willingly. Most smokers understand the risks associated with that choice. But those who are exposed to secondhand smoke in the workplace, many of whom have limited employment options, can suffer from the same consequences as the smoker.

The inclusion of e-cigarettes in this law is an important element. There is no scientific evidence showing that they are safe or that they can help smokers quit. A 2009 study done by the FDA found cancer-causing substances in several of the e-cigarette samples tested. Additionally, Food and Drug Administration tests found nicotine in some e-cigarettes that claimed to contain no nicotine. Extensive study is needed on these relatively new products before they should be considered safe. At this point, much of the research suggests that they are not safe at all.

Unfortunately, I see the long-term effects of smoking and secondhand smoke in people of all ages. These are preventable conditions that increase health care costs to non-smokers and smokers. In fact, many of the chronic diseases in my practice that I see today are the result of lifestyle choices we make each and every day. The elimination of smoke in our workplaces and public spaces is one way we can make a very large positive impact on health and healthcare for our future.

Please join me in urging our Valley legislative delegation to pass a statewide smoke-free workplace law this year.

Jill K. Valerius, MD

Palmer

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Advocacy groups voice support for Alaska Smoke-Free Indoor Workplaces bill

ANCHORAGE, Alaska— Local advocacy groups — AARP, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and the Alaska Native Health Board — are backing a bill that would make all indoor workplaces in Alaska smoke-free, saying it would protect the health and safety of all workers and business patrons.

"Only half of residents already live in communities with smoke-free workplace laws. A smoke-free Alaska would create healthier environments and benefit business employees and customers. Everyone has the right to breathe smoke-free air," said Marge Stoneking, Alaska Director, American Lung Association.

The Alaska Smoke-Free Indoor Workplaces bill was introduced Wednesday by Representative Lindsey Holmes (HB 360) and Senator Peter Micciche (SB 209), and would prohibit smoking in all indoor workplaces, businesses and public spaces. Individuals who choose to smoke will have to "take it outside" in order to protect others from the effects of secondhand smoke.

"The U.S. Surgeon General has concluded that there is no risk-free exposure to secondhand smoke. Scientific studies have proven that smoke-free laws save lives — the incidence of heart attacks decrease after they are implemented," said Dr. Bob Urata, a physician and volunteer for the American Heart Association. A 2006 report by the Surgeon General, *"The Health Consequences of Smoking,"* reports that non-smokers exposed to secondhand smoke increased their risk of heart disease and lung cancer, and called it a major cause of preventable deaths.

"Four out of 5 adults in Alaska support smoke-free workplaces, and businesses throughout the state have pledged their support for a statewide law," said Emily Nenon, Alaska State Director, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. The coalition reports that more than 400 businesses and community organizations have expressed their support, which are listed on the website, www.SmokeFreeAlaska.com.

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Posted: March 5, 2014

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Supporters call for Alaska lawmakers to expand smoke-free workplace laws

April 07, 2014
Monday PM

(SitNews) Anchorage, Alaska - Supporters of the Alaska Smoke-Free Indoor Workplace bill (SB209) sent the message to lawmakers last Thursday that it's time for Alaska to have statewide smoke-free laws. The proposed law got a hearing yesterday with the Senate State Affairs Committee at the Capitol in Juneau.

If enacted SB209 will prohibit smoking in all indoor workplaces, businesses and public spaces. Individuals who choose to smoke will have to "take it outside" in order to protect others from the effects of secondhand smoke. The bill was introduced by Senator Peter Micciche in the Senate and Representative Lindsey Holmes in the House (HB360).

A coalition of Alaskan advocacy groups - American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, the Alaska Native Health Board, and AARP - are urging lawmakers to vote yes for the bill, to protect the health and safety of all workers and business patrons from secondhand smoke.

Though a self-described "man of small government," Sen. Micciche testified that, "... like vehicle safety and car seats, [secondhand smoke prevention] is a public health and safety issue that government has a role in."

"More than 400 businesses and organizations have stated their support of this bill, signing resolutions that they do want smoke-free workplaces as the statewide standard," stated Sen. Micciche in his testimony.

Dr. Bob Urata, a Juneau physician and American Heart Association volunteer, testified during the hearing that the dangers of secondhand smoke are well established. "Secondhand smoke kills nearly 50,000 people in the United States every year. The 2006 U.S. Surgeon General's report found that brief secondhand smoke exposure can have an immediate adverse effect on the cardiovascular system."

Breathing secondhand smoke interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood, and vascular systems in ways that increase the risk of having a heart attack. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, even brief exposure to secondhand smoke can damage the lining of blood vessels and cause your blood

platelets to become stickier. These changes can cause a deadly heart attack or stroke.

SB209 would also restrict the use of controversial electronic cigarettes in indoor spaces, asking users to take it outside for the health of others. Opponents of the bill, notably the Tobacco Industry, argue that e-cigarettes do not produce smoke like traditional cigarettes and emit "harmless water vapors" instead. However, Marge Stoneking, Alaska Director of the American Lung Association, testified that, "E-cigarette secondhand aerosol has been found to contain ultrafine particulates, heavy metals, and volatile organic compounds, which are risks for lung cancer, in addition to nicotine."

Currently only half of Alaska's population is covered by a local smoke-free workplace law. The bill passed out of committee and will be heard again on Monday in the Senate Health and Social Services Committee.

On the Web:

Learn more about the Alaska Smoke-Free Indoor Workplaces effort
www.SmokeFreeAlaska.com

Source of News:

American Lung Association

Cancer Action Network

American Heart Association

AARP

American Stroke Association

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Statewide Smoking Ban Gains Traction In Senate

By [Aaron Selbig, KBBI - Homer](#) | April 9, 2014 - 5:28 pm

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A proposal that would ban smoking in most public places in Alaska is making headway in the state Senate. Senate Bill 209 passed out of the Senate State Affairs Committee last week.

VmP

The bill would ban smoking in office buildings, sports arenas, taxicabs, bars and restaurants, among other public places.

Many places in Alaska, including Anchorage, Juneau and Bethel, already have similar bans. As a result of those bans, nearly half of Alaska's population is already affected by a workplace smoking ban.

Soldotna Senator Peter Micciche is the bill's sponsor. He told the Senate State Affairs Committee Thursday that normally, he a "small government kind of guy." In this case, however, he feels it's appropriate for the government to get involved to protect the health of workers.

"Just as it's appropriate for government to set safety standards in automobiles, electrical codes for wiring (and) requirements for infant and child carrier seats," he said.

Micciche says the state takes on much of the economic costs associated with second-hand smoke, which he said kills more Alaskans each year than automobile accidents. He also made the point that second-class cities and unorganized boroughs in Alaska do not have the legal authority to enact their own smoking bans.

But most importantly, Micciche said the issue is for him, a very personal one. He spoke about his father, who passed away from a smoking-related illness.

"My father made his personal choices," said Micciche. "But my siblings and I didn't. I'm the lucky one of the three. They all had respiratory issues from living through second-hand smoke effects."

Micciche said more than 400 businesses and organizations have signed on in support of his bill. Committee Chairman Fred Dyson said most of the comments his office has received about the bill have also been supportive of the state doing something.

Larry Hackenmiller testified from Fairbanks on behalf of the Interior Cabaret, Hotel, Restaurant and Retailer's Association. He said Fairbanks rejected a similar law. He also took issue with some of the numbers put forward about hazards related to second-hand smoke.

"There is no hazard to second-hand smoke in a workplace ... period," said Hackenmiller.

Gary Superman owns the Hunger Hut bar in Nikiski. He called the smoking ban an infringement on his rights as a business owner. Superman described his bar as a "blue-collar tavern" that would be "irreparably harmed economically" by the ban.

Kenai businessman John Parker spoke in favor of the proposed ban, saying it would “level the playing field” for business owners on the Kenai Peninsula who may be afraid that banning smoking would give a leg up to their competition. More importantly, Parker said that customers and employees have a fundamental right to smoke-free air.

A couple of amendments have been proposed to the bill. One would include the use of e-cigarettes in the ban. The other would set up an appeal process for businesses who would like to “opt out.”

The bill also provides an “opt out” clause for local municipalities, which would be granted only if a local election is held and a majority of voters choose to exempt themselves from the smoking ban.

After nearly an hour of testimony, SB 209 passed out of the Senate State Affairs Committee. It heads now to the Health and Social Services Committee. A companion bill is also working its way through the Alaska House.

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