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Tobacco

NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC.
1000 STATE STREET, SUITE 200, BOSTON, MA 02109

FORUM: Smoking in public

Protect public from tar-and-nicotine junkies

EDITOR'S NOTE: Laws that restrict smoking in public: Are they a good idea? John Banzhaf III, executive director of Action on Smoking and Health, feels they are, but Walker Merryman, vice president of the Tobacco Institute, argues that their premise — that environmental smoke threatens non-smokers — is unfounded.

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By JOHN F. BANZHAF III
Action on Smoking and Health favors restrictions on smoking in public places for many reasons.

The U.S. Public Health Service, National Academy of Sciences, World Health Organization and many other scientific and medical organizations have all concluded that:

- Secondhand tobacco smoke can and does cause lung cancer in "involuntary smokers."

- Thousands of innocent non-smokers die each year from breathing other people's tobacco smoke.

- Toxic chemicals in smoke cause physical irritation to non-smokers, especially to tens of millions with asthma, hay fever, allergies and other conditions.



- Other people's smoking creates major health risks for children.

Tobacco smoke is clearly the most prevalent, the most annoying and the most dangerous pollutant to which most Americans are exposed. Non-smokers are entitled to be protected from this pollutant, just as we are from other pollutants in the air, water, workplace, etc.

It is legally, morally and ethically wrong for a minority (30 percent) to inflict serious health hazards and physical irritation on a majority simply because it brings them pleasure. It is equally wrong to require non-smokers to inhale this deadly

mixture during daily activities such as eating out, visiting a post office, buying an airline ticket or working for a living.

While voluntary efforts to limit smoking by businesses should be encouraged, legislation is necessary to provide uniform protection.

Too often, employees are forced to leave jobs or not accept promotions or transfers because of illness caused by office smoking. Clearly, common courtesy doesn't always work.

In many cases, non-smoking workers have been awarded substantial sums where courts or agencies found that their health had been permanently damaged

by workplace tobacco smoke.

It is the duty of governments to protect citizens from health hazards, even if business owners do not recognize the need. For example, restaurants are not free to omit a sneeze guard at salad bars, wash dishes in cold water or permit spitting.

Some have argued that there is a "right" to smoke. But if there is a right to smoke tobacco in public places, there presumably would be a corresponding right to chew tobacco and spit, burn incense and drink alcoholic beverages in public places — which, of course, there is not.

Indeed, many other activities — like listening to loud music —

are often prohibited in some public places, even though there is no health risk or physical irritation. Does this really constitute illegal "discrimination" against tobacco chewers, alcoholics or music lovers — as the tobacco industry claims with regard to smokers?

Today, 80 percent of smokers agree that smoking should be banned or limited to separate sections in the workplace. Almost 40 percent of businesses have smoking policies, and state or local laws in 49 states limit smoking in public places.

The tobacco industry cites so-called studies to show that tobacco smoke isn't hazardous to non-smokers, and that smoking laws aren't necessary. But it also cites "studies" to show that smoking isn't necessarily hazardous even for smokers.

Where your health and the health of your loved ones is at stake, are you going to believe the tobacco industry, or the U.S. Surgeon General, the AMA and many other impartial sources? Non-smokers should learn the facts and demand legislation now!

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Smoking age could be 18 if bill passes

Tobacco
By Barbara Steinberger
Register Staff

HARTFORD — A bill that would ban the sale of cigarettes to persons younger than 18 was sparked back to life Wednesday after being extinguished by a legislative committee earlier in the day.

The General Assembly's Finance Committee killed the bill Wednesday morning on an 8 to 6 vote. With a little behind-the-scenes maneuvering, however, supporters managed to revive the proposal by adding it as an amendment to an unrelated bill on the House floor.

The House approved the amended bill by a vote of 129 to 3. The measure still needs state Senate approval and Gov. William A. O'Neill's signature.

Currently, cigarettes and other tobacco products can be sold to anyone age 16 or older. If it becomes law, the measure would take effect Oct. 1.

"It's a bill that you absolutely in no way will have any control over. We can't stop kids from drinking booze at 18 when the drinking age is 21. How are you going to stop them from smoking cigarettes?" said Rep. Frederick Gelsi, D-Enfield, a smoker who voted against the bill in the Finance Committee.

Rep. Ronald Smoko, D-Hamden, co-chairman of the committee and also a smoker, conceded the bill would be hard to enforce, but he said it makes an important statement.

"If a 17-year-old wants to smoke he's going to be able to get a pack of cigarettes. But it (the bill) says that smoking is bad, and that 16- and 17-year-olds should not smoke," said Smoko, who voted for the bill.