

Study: Smoking ban helps hearts

Researchers find heart attack hospitalizations reduced

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Researchers have found that a workplace smoking ban in Pueblo, Colo., has reduced heart attack hospitalizations drastically, but local and statewide players on both sides of the smoking-ban issue generally have not changed their positions.

The recent study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the number of heart attack hospitalizations declined by 41 percent three years after the ban took effect, while two neighboring communities did not experience such a change.

Julie Willems Van Dijk, Marathon County health officer, characterized the study as mounting proof of the clear benefits bans offer by reducing the number of smokers and the amount of secondhand smoke.

"It's one more piece of evidence," she said. "It was good to see this."

Opponents of local and statewide bans, however, say the Pueblo study and several that came before it fail to account for any number of factors that affect a community's health.

"A lot of that stuff ...

we kind of look at that as junk science," said Rob Swearingen, president of the Tavern League of Wisconsin.

While advocates of "clean-air" communities consider the ban a major boon to public health, opponents see problems.

Viaduct Bar owner Mary Lou Duerr said the smoking ban is a violation of business owners' rights, and has had sharp economical repercussions.

"I have talked to the majority of bar owners in the area, and we have seen a 30-35 percent decrease in business," she said.

Duerr — who has been an owner of the Viaduct Bar, 1701 W. McMillan St., for 20 years — said that the studies are not fully accurate because they fail to consider lifestyles and genetics.

The ban has turned "Marshfield into an island," since people can travel 10 miles to another bar to smoke, Duerr said.

"Why would they come here when they go to a bar that allows smoking?" she asked.

Willems Van Dijk said the corresponding benefit is a decrease in health care costs. To some opponents, though, the study is another example of pro-ban propaganda.

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Marathon County health officer