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Smoking bans will affect most of Dane County by end of summer

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Whether or not a statewide smoking ban included in Gov. Jim Doyle's 2009-11 budget proposal becomes law, most Dane County residents will find themselves living in smoke-free communities by the end of the summer, as municipal and county smoking bans go into effect.

About 475,000 people live in Dane County, of those, about 365,000 — more than three-quarters of the population — live in areas that either have, or soon will have, smoking bans, according to a State Journal analysis.

A ban passed in October by the Dane County Board, which will take effect Aug. 15, will prohibit smoking in public places and businesses in all towns and other unincorporated areas of the county, which are home to about 80,000 people.

Adding to the momentum will be bans set to take effect in Middleton on March 15, Monona on June 1 and the village of Waunakee in early 2010. They will join Madison, Fitchburg and the village of Shorewood Hills, all of which have smoking bans already in effect.

The county won't be entirely wiped clear of smokers' havens, however. Remaining will be several villages, most of which do not have smoking bans and have no plans to enact bans anytime soon, and three cities, Stoughton, Sun Prairie and Verona.

The County Board passed a resolution in September urging the remaining cities and villages in the county to enact smoke-free ordinances, but so far most have not moved to do so.

"We haven't heard an outcry from the public here saying that they want nonsmoking facilities here," said Joe Chase, mayor of Sun Prairie, the largest municipality without a smoking ban left in the county.

Chase said there was a consensus on the City Council that smoking regulation ought to be a business decision, although he said the city would comply if Doyle's proposed ban were to become law. His sentiment is shared by officials at most villages as well, many of whom said they would wait to see what the Legislature did before taking any action themselves.

Officials sharing that perspective appear to be a dwindling group, however, as Verona prepares to create a smoking ban.

The details of a proposed ordinance currently being hashed out in Verona's Public Safety and Welfare Committee are uncertain, said City Administrator Shawn Murphy, but the general consensus on the City

Council favors a ban.

"I don't think anybody's come out staunchly against it," he said. "They know that most of the communities around us have adopted or are in the process of adopting some form of regulation," and while public hearings on the subject have at times been emotional, "there is some general momentum to get something in place."

The earliest the Verona City Council could vote on the issue is April 13, he said.

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