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Report: City taverns' air much cleaner

By Leader-Telegram staff

Air in Eau Claire taverns is 95 percent cleaner since the city's smoking ban took effect in July, according to a report released today by the Eau Claire City-County Health Department.

"This study provides hard data that air in taverns affected by the ordinance has become much healthier to breathe," health department Director Richard Thoune said in a news release. "That's good news for employees and customers at Eau Claire taverns."

Clean air hasn't improved business at Eau Claire bars, said Chuck Kaiser, co-owner of O'Leary's Pub, 809 W. Clairemont Ave.

"There really hasn't been any new customers," he said. "Overall it's decreased. They're going outside the city."

In the study, air was tested at six bars. Four taverns were within city limits, and two were outside Eau Claire. All six bars recorded air pollution at hazardous levels prior to the smoking ordinance.

After the law was enacted July 1, the four taverns within the city limits registered good air quality, showing a 95 percent or better improvement.

At the two out-of-town bars where smoking still was permitted, air quality remained hazardous. One tavern showed pollutants at four times the hazardous level.

Hazardous is the most dangerous air quality level ranked by the Environmental Protection Agency. Good is the best.

The study did not identify the taverns.

Testers used professional air-monitoring devices for about 30 minutes in each bar. The first tests were taken Feb. 16, 2008, and March 6, 2008. The second tests were Feb. 19 and 20 of this year. Testing times were from about 5:30 to 10 p.m.

Data were sent to the University of Wisconsin Paul P. Carbone Comprehensive Cancer Center, which prepared a 10-page report.

Eau Claire's workplace smoking ban took effect July 1. The city has required all restaurants to be smoke-free since May 2000.

The state Legislature is considering a bill that would impose a statewide ban starting July 5, 2010.