

EDITORIAL

Statewide **smoking ban** will save lives, money

The issue: Gov. Jim Doyle proposes a statewide **smoking ban.**

Our view: The enormous human and financial costs of smoking make the ban wise.

In January 1964, the U.S. surgeon general issued a report based on 7,000 medical articles on smoking and disease. "Cigarette smoking," the report declared, "is a health hazard of sufficient importance in the United States to warrant appropriate remedial action."

However, "remedial action" has been slow — and during the past 43 years millions of Americans have died unnecessarily of cancer, cardiovascular disease and other smoking-related ailments.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, "Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States," causing approximately 440,000 deaths annually. That's more than 1,200 preventable deaths each day.

Despite its enormity, the death toll undoubtedly would be larger

if not for ongoing efforts such as warning labels, tobacco advertising restrictions, smoking bans and youth education.

On Wednesday, Gov. Jim Doyle proposed the next step in reducing the death toll: a statewide ban on smoking in all public buildings, including workplaces, taverns and restaurants.

"Despite our progress over the last few years, too many of our kids are still lighting up, too many lives are being cut short, and the cost of treating tobacco-related illnesses in Wisconsin alone has swelled into the billions," Doyle said.

We believe Doyle's sweeping proposal is the right thing to do. Simply put, it will save lives and money.

Yes, it will inconvenience smokers — but that's part of the point. Having to step outside for

a nicotine fix, especially in the depths of a Wisconsin winter, undoubtedly gives smokers second thoughts about their addiction. Furthermore, the ban would shield nonsmokers from the noxious effects of secondhand smoke, which itself is a known health hazard.

Opponents — including smokers, tavern owners and some lawmakers — already have voiced objections to Doyle's plan. They worry about the impact it will have on businesses. However, instituting the ban statewide will ensure smokers won't flee a restaurant or tavern in one **smoke-free** city in favor of establishments in cities that allow smoking. In addition, smoking bans aren't necessarily bad for business. The city of Eau Claire's restaurant **smoking ban**, passed in 2000, didn't

devastate the city's eateries. In fact, some establishments — such as Stella Blues and Buffalo Wild Wings — have even thrived by offering patrons places to enjoy drinks without sucking secondhand smoke.

We agree governments always must take great care when restricting personal rights. However, when the number of lives lost is combined with the enormous cost to taxpayers for caring for ill smokers, it's clear that in this case the rights of the general public outweigh those of the inconvenienced smokers.

While Doyle's plan will be debated — and likely amended — by the Legislature, we hope lawmakers pass this important legislation.

— Tom Giffey, editorial page editor