

Smoking ban best for public, workers' health

Finally, state lawmakers are starting to see the light when it comes to the dangers of second-hand smoke. Or maybe they're just feeling the pressure of a majority of angry citizens who want smoking banned in bars and restaurants.

Either way, a **smoking ban** in all public workplaces has been long overdue. Better late than never!

Fifteen states already ban smoking in the workplace and the list appears to be growing. Smoking bans already exist in parts of Minnesota and last Thursday lawmakers there introduced a proposal for a total **smoking ban** in the state's bars, restaurants, taxis and limousines. The ban would go into effect Aug. 1, 2007.

Here in Wisconsin, Gov. Jim Doyle is the latest to join in the anti-smoking crusade. What took so long?

Doyle favors a **smoking ban** in all public places, including restaurants, bars and workplaces. The governor also proposed an increase in the cigarette tax and plans to continue youth **anti-smoking** programs — yet isn't that just putting a band-aid on a much bigger problem?

A **smoking ban** in bars and restaurants would be a significant step in the right direction.

While Doyle's plan is sure to be met with resistance, it will be applauded by those who believe a **smoking ban** is long overdue.

This is not an issue about taking away someone's freedom to smoke. And it's not an issue of government interference.

This is a public health issue — plain and simple.

It is widely known that second-hand smoke is a bad for people's health. The U.S. Surgeon General, the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association and the American Heart Association report that exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of heart disease, lung cancer and respiratory disease — even in non-smokers.

The Clean Air Act should apply to all businesses — not just some. Bar and restaurant employees should not have to be subjected to an unhealthy environment.

Neither should anyone else for that matter. Beside the much-publicized dangers of second-hand smoke, there are other factors to consider such as the foul stench that contaminates clothing and hair. Other side effects can include headaches and a burning feeling in the eyes.

When you think about it, it's really non-smokers who have been penalized over the years. They've had to put up with second-hand smoke in bars and restaurants for far too long.

An estimated 75-80 percent of Americans don't smoke and prefer non-smoking settings. Why give into the small minority of smokers who desperately cling to their so-called rights?

What about the rights of non-smokers?

Bar owners might be worried that a **smoking ban** could negatively affect their business. While there may be a dip at first, recent reports have indicated that many bar and restaurant owners have seen business rebound — and in some cases increase — after laws banning smoking were initiated. Customers were attracted to the healthier environments.

Hopefully, more smoking bans will pass so all patrons can enjoy a cleaner, healthier atmosphere. In the long run, it's best for everyone.