

Health district will no longer enforce smoking ban

Responsibility will be assumed by the state

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After many months of consideration and discussion, the Logan County District Board of Health voted unanimously Wednesday afternoon to withdraw the agency's role as the county's designated enforcer of the statewide smoking ban. The decision was made primarily because of financial concerns, at a time when the board is preparing to make possible budget cuts for 2009 if an operating levy does not pass next year. "We are not provided with any money from the state to enforce the smoking ban," said Dr. Boyd Hoddinott, health commissioner. The LCHD has been enforcing the smoking ban, which prohibits smoking in any "public place" or "place of employment," since May. However, it will now need to inform the state in writing that it no longer wishes to carry out enforcement, an option permitted under the law. The majority of county health departments around the state have agreed to enforce the ban, but several, including agencies in Ashtabula, Highland and Portage counties, also

have opted out of the obligation because of financial restraints, according to Cincinnati's WLWT-TV, www.wlwt.com. Prior to its decision Wednesday, the LCHD received some revenue from the smoking ban in the form of fines from various establishments. However, Dr. Hoddinott said few fines were handed out because most complaints are from anonymous persons and are difficult to document. Overall, the small amount of revenue the district received from fines did not balance the various expenses necessary to enforce the ban. "Our primary expenses with enforcing the ban are in man hours," Dr. Hoddinott said. "Craig (Kauffman, director of environmental health) spends hours each week going out to look at complaints and writing up letters." Although imposing the ban was taking agency time and money, board members said the health district did not have the resources at its disposal to carry out the law so that it was applied fairly to all county establishments. "I've had people tell me that we are overlooking some establishments in the county

who are not complying with the smoking ban," said board member Robin Price. "I think we either need to fairly and thoroughly enforce the law or turn it back to the state."