

Smoking ban: Seven days later

Local officials, businesses still sorting out details of new law

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Although it's been seven days since the statewide smoking ban took effect, local health officials say numerous local business owners and patrons are not following the law because the state cannot enforce it at this time.

"It's kind of a mess," said Logan County Health Commissioner Dr. Boyd Hoddinott, who opposes public smoking. "Because we can't enforce the ban at this time, people think it's a green light to break the law."

Dr. Hoddinott said businesses should comply with the law, which was overwhelmingly approved by statewide voters, now by removing ashtrays, posting "no-smoking" signs and telling patrons they cannot smoke.

"Those who do not enforce the smoking ban now are still breaking the law," he said. "It's as simple as that. Public smoking is illegal now. To those who choose to break the law: Patrons can call the number the state provides (866-559-6446), and I think the state should look at all the complaints they receive. (These) complaints could hurt business in the future."

State health officials have up to six months to write enforcement on the smoking ban, which was approved by voters in Logan County by 8,932-7,518 votes, local health officials reported. However, Dr. Hoddinott said, businesses that do not comply could face other consequences.

"The (Ohio Department of Health) could keep a list of those who choose not to comply," Dr. Hoddinott said. "Furthermore, non-smokers may not patronize the businesses (that allow smoking now) after the enforcement laws are established.

"Greater than the law are the health implications," Dr. Hoddinott said. "We, as public health officials, understand the risk of second-hand smoke not only to the public, but also to employees and to people at risk for lung and heart disease — we understand the risk to children. We strongly agree with the majority of Ohioans (who approved the measure)."

Dr. Hoddinott stressed that the next six months is the implementation phase and not a grace period, during which, he said, compliance is required.

Environmental Health Director Craig Kauffman said he was initially concerned the health district would become inundated with calls from business patrons with complaints when the law went into effect.

This, however, has not been the case.

"I'm getting calls from business owners that are trying to enforce the smoking ban, but their clients are questioning them because they go to other places where they are allowed to smoke," Mr. Kauffman said. "We are getting calls from business patrons, mainly patrons of restaurants, saying there is still smoking and they want to know how to file a complaint."

One business that is enforcing the smoking ban is the management of T-P Bowling Lanes, 300 E. Lake Ave., according to Mr. Kauffman.

Owner Bill Jullien said he is disappointed that many of his customers tell him he is one of the few businesses in town to enforce the law.

As far as business goes, he said, he has not noticed a change in revenue because of the ban.

"It really hasn't affected anything yet," he said. "But I'll know for sure by the end of the week, when I see the numbers. We definitely are enforcing it, though, and I know a lot of businesses that are not. We are getting a lot of complaints from people who say a lot of other businesses in town aren't enforcing it because the state can't do anything now. I just wish the state would start enforcing it because we look like the bad guys. Right now, it makes those of us who are enforcing it look like the bad guys."