

Smoking becoming taboo in US workplace, homes and even in public

The property manager at The Blairs, an apartment complex near Washington, recently sent tenants a letter that has many up in arms: Stop smoking at home come January or move out, the note essentially said.

The letter came as a rude awakening to residents of the 1,400-unit complex, some of whom have been living there for more than 10 years and who would not be allowed to renew their lease if they do not comply with the new rule.

But the measure is by no means an isolated incident in a country where smoking is increasingly becoming taboo in restaurants, in the workplace, outdoors and even in one's own car and home.

So far, 19 US states and 2,300 cities, including New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, have adopted legislation against cigarette smoking, citing health concerns. The US capital joins the list beginning in January.

In the midwestern state of Ohio, which this week became the latest state to ban smoking in the workplace and in public areas, violators face 100 dollars if caught puffing on a cigarette on the doorstep of their workplace, as has become the custom in many cities.

The law calls for smokers to stand at least six meters (20 feet) away from a building's entrance so as not to allow smoke to enter.

Outdoor smoking bans are also in effect on the balconies and porches of companies in the northwestern state of Washington, in some San Francisco parks and on beaches and various zoos across the country. Several hotel chains, including the Marriott and Westin, have also implemented smoking bans this year.

Even cities that came to symbolize the cigarette industry are not spared. In Louisville, located in the central-eastern state of Kentucky, where much of the world's cigarettes were once produced, smoking will be banned in public places come July.

"Research shows that more than 126 million Americans are exposed to second-hand smoke and there are more than 3,000 deaths a year due to lung cancer of non-smokers," said Colleen Wilber, spokeswoman for the American Cancer Society, which has lobbied to pass anti-smoking laws in the country.

"So the debate on that is pretty much over, ... and there is overwhelming support for these laws in the United States," Wilber told AFP.

She added, however, that the powerful organization is not involved in lobbying to ban smoking in private residences.

According to statistics, some 21 percent of Americans are smokers, compared with 26.5 percent 20 years ago.

Jeffrey Schaler, a law professor at American University in Washington and author of "Addiction is a Choice", said the anti-smoking laws being adopted nationwide are "characteristics of the therapeutic state".

"The government shouldn't protect me from myself," Schaler argued.

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