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## New year, new habits; Smoking ban both a challenge and relief

**An indoor smoking ban has Illinois business owners wondering how the move will affect their bottom line while smokers contemplate the cold reality of the future**

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Tom Kristof plastered no-smoking signs and offered how-to-quit pamphlets at his Round Lake Beach bowling alley and bar Tuesday, evidence of a statewide ban that snuffed out cigarettes in virtually all public places.

With the new year, stacks of ashtrays were shelved for the final time, and cigarette breaks were scheduled outdoors for employees who haven't kicked the habit. At Kristof's Entertainment Center, a banner was hung cautioning smokers to stay inside so they wouldn't ruin their bowling shoes.

At 12:01 a.m., Illinois became the 22nd state to curb smoking in bars, restaurants and sports stadiums.

Hours later, determined smokers huddled together for a drag amid swirling snow even as many vowed to kick the habit. Confronted with new restrictions, freezing temperatures and the perennial lure of New Year resolutions, many said this seemed like as good a time as any to quit.

Jim Pittacora, 26, lit up outside the Cork & Kerry pub on Chicago's South Side just after midnight to mark the new year. Back in the Beverly establishment Tuesday afternoon -- this time without his Marlboro Lights -- Pittacora sought a personal reminder in the inaugural "no smoking" sign.

"I would have had at least six cigarettes by now," said Pittacora, who limited himself to one day of smoking per week in anticipation of the policy.

Others reveled in the cigarette-free bar experience.

Melissa Mulderink, 26, of Chicago sent her friend a text message wishing her a "happy no more smoking in bars

day." In town visiting friends, Sassy Spedoske, 27, enjoyed the Wisconsin-Tennessee game in a North Side pub without her smoke allergies flaring up. Bartender Pete Mazzone reported to the Waterhouse Tavern & Grill in the Lakeview neighborhood, knowing Tuesday would be a shift like none other.

"Yeah, I can breathe," Mazzone, 25, said as he poured a steady stream of Bloody Marys and Bellinis. "We've been counting down."

The sweeping restrictions take aim at all public buildings, college dormitories and most businesses. In so doing, the ban stitches together a patchwork of local smoking prohibitions passed mostly in the Chicago region during recent years.

Smokers no longer may light up within 15 feet of building entrances or open windows, according to the law enacted in July. Those who flout the rules risk fines from \$100 to \$250 for individuals and \$250 to \$2,500 for businesses. Exceptions exist for tobacco stores and hookah lounges that do not serve food or alcohol. Certain private and semi-private rooms in hotels, long-term care facilities and nursing homes also are exempt.

At 20.5 percent, Illinois' smoking rate hovered just below the national average of 20.8 percent in 2006, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The state's share of adults who smoke every day declined from nine years earlier. In 1997, 23.2 percent of adult residents smoked in Illinois, even with the national figure.

Whether the new law -- lauded by health advocates and labeled a "small nightmare" by many bar and restaurant owners -- could spur smokers to put down their cigarettes remains unclear.

Little evidence exists to conclusively link smoking bans to changes in adult smoking rates, although research shows the incidence declined in places where high cigarette taxes and anti-tobacco advertising accompanied such restrictions. California, for instance, saw its smoking rate dip from 17.5 percent in 1998 to 13.3 percent in 2006 after a two-tiered ban took effect in 1995 and 1998, the state's health department reports.

Quitting may get easier

In Illinois, health officials peppered bars and restaurants with smoking cessation information and quit kits before Jan. 1. Many smokers try an average seven times before they are successfully able to quit, said Joel Africk, president of the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. Without a hint of tobacco wafting through bars, clubs or bowling alleys, stopping may be easier now.

"There are smokers who lapse back into it with a night at a bar. Well, that's not going to happen now," Africk said. "We are hoping this will allow smokers who are trying to quit to have more success with it."

Ron Gerstenberger, 71, said he had no plans to end the habit he took up more than five decades ago. The Lake Villa man began the year with breakfast at Hillside Family Restaurant in Grayslake, sitting with his partner, Dorothy Giustino, in what had been the smoking section. They come at least once a week and have been for years. But Gerstenberger said they may start heading across the border to Wisconsin, where he still can nurse a cigarette along with his morning coffee.

'It should be your choice'

"I don't like being told what to do," Gerstenberger said. "It should be your choice."

Outside the Schoolyard Tavern & Grill on Chicago's North Side, smoker Luis Felix shrugged off the inconvenience now that the law requires he leave the bar to light up. Felix, 31, said he already excuses himself to smoke when he's out with friends.

"I thought it was a bit amusing. But it's not that big of a deal if Ireland, New York and L.A. can do it," Felix said. On Jan. 1, France and 11 of Germany's 16 states became the latest European regions to restrict cigarette use in

cafes, bars and restaurants.

#### Impact on businesses

What such prohibitions mean for business owners' bottom lines and daily responsibilities remains unclear. Restaurant and bar proprietors now may need to consider sweeping cigarette butts found outside their front doors and controlling any additional noise.

"Ultimately, they'll decide how they feel at the end of the year when they see their revenues," said Sheila O'Grady, president of the Illinois Restaurant Association.

In Round Lake Beach, Kristof said it could be a wash. He may lose patrons who will spend an hour rather than three bowling because of the no-cigarette rule. Kristof said the smoke-free guarantee also could draw new clients to the bowling alley, video arcade and weekend Karaoke.

"The good side is there are a lot of non-smokers out there. The bad thing is how long will it take them to find us," said Kristof, who quit smoking 10 years ago. "Is it going to be a tremendous impact? I can't judge that yet."

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