

Secondhand smoke, litter seen as threats  
By Andrew Schroedter

Special to the **Chicago Tribune**

January 30, 2008

Banished from public buildings and bars, smokers in some North Shore communities soon could see beaches and playgrounds added to the roster of tobacco-free venues.

The Glencoe Park Board is considering an ordinance that would ban smoking at the community's lakefront, and Evanston may outlaw smoking at its six beaches and approximately 60 playgrounds and tot lots.

Smoking at the beach already is banned in Chicago, Lake Forest and Wilmette, with Deerfield, Buffalo Grove and Oak Park among the suburbs with smoke-free parks.

Advocates of these outdoor smoking bans cite the health risks from exposure to secondhand smoke and litter from cigarette butts.

"We have some high-profile public spaces, particularly the beach, where there's a lot of young kids," said Glencoe Park District Board Commissioner Chris Pfaff. "The thought of a lot people smoking down there is not appealing."

On Jan. 1 Illinois became the 23rd state to implement an indoor smoking ban, outlawing smoking in public buildings, including taverns, restaurants, bowling alleys, nightclubs and sports arenas; and within 15 feet of doorways to office towers, train stations and other public buildings.

The state ban does not apply to beaches and other outdoor spaces.

Pfaff said Glencoe may pass its ordinance before the beach opens in May.

Evanston's ban, recommended by the city's Playground and Recreation Board after some residents raised the idea, would require the City Council's approval, said Doug Gaynor, director of the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Department in Evanston.

"I think what these cities and suburbs are hitting upon is that cigarettes are a litter problem," said Joel Africk, president of the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. "On the beaches, cigarettes present a litter and a health problem."

Garnet Dawn Scheuer, founder and president of Illinois Smokers Rights, said towns are using litter as an excuse to enact anti-smoking policies that infringe on personal freedoms.

Discarded cigarette butts would become less of a problem if towns provided public ashtrays, something Scheuer claims have disappeared from sidewalks and other public areas.

"This is a witch hunt," she said. "They're trying to create a never-never land where they don't see smoking. It's never going to work."

Since passing a smoke ban at its beach last year, Wilmette has struggled to keep people from smoking at night after the area has closed and no Park District staff are present to enforce the rule, said Thomas Grisamore, executive director of the Wilmette Park District.

When the beach is open, the district doesn't field many complaints from smokers, who can puff away in a designated area outside the beach's entrance.

"People are all very understanding," Grisamore said.