

The benefits of banning smoking in Idaho bars

Last week marked the 34th annual Great American Smokeout, the American Cancer Society's brainchild aimed at helping those with nicotine addictions kick the habit.

Much has changed since the event was first held in 1977. Tobacco companies have seen domestic sales plummet as the health risks associated with tobacco consumption have become more universally accepted.

Lawsuits have unmasked Big Tobacco's knowledge of the harmful effects of smoking and chewing tobacco, as well as only - ings, but to make their products even more addictive.

In 2004, the Idaho Legislature passed Idaho's Clean Indoor Air Act, placing the state in the vanguard of guaranteeing smoke-free public places. The legislation was premised on studies that showed secondhand smoke presents a health risk.

In the successive five legislative sessions, no other legislation has been proposed to address the one last bastion of public smoking — bars.

During that time, most of our neighboring states have caught up with and passed Idaho in ensuring a smoke-free environment for our citizens.

Eight Western states have enacted legislation banning smoking from restaurants, bars and nonhospitality workplaces: Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. Nevada, with its formidable gaming industry, still allows smoking in bars, but has banned it in other public venues.

Wyoming is the only Western state that has no statewide controls regarding smoking, but several cities, including Laramie, Evanston and Cheyenne, have enacted comprehensive bans in public places, including bars. Idaho's Clean Indoor Air Act specifically provides that local governments may adopt more restrictive regulations. This summer, Moscow became the first city in Idaho to pass a ban that covers bars, private clubs and anywhere within 20 feet of public places. Boise State University implemented a campus-wide smoking ban beginning in the fall semester.

In Pocatello, several bar owners decided to go smokeless in the last few years, with positive responses from their clientele and workers. Given the data collected recently by a Boise-based group, Coalition for a Healthy Idaho, the move to ban smoking in bars is a healthy and humane move.

The group found that bars in the Treasure Valley, on average, are 15 more times polluted than restaurants, which are covered by Idaho's Clean Indoor Air Act. The bars reached pollution levels some 36 times greater than outdoor pollution levels. The study found that full-time bar employees were exposed to more than four times the average annual EPA-recommended limits of fine particulate air pollution.

Boise City Councilwoman Elaine Clegg, along with representatives of Smokefree Idaho, are scheduled to speak today to the Association of Idaho Cities, representatives of which are meeting in Boise to discuss strategies for the upcoming 2010 legislative session.

Clegg and Smokefree Idaho will urge local government entities to adopt their own restrictions on smoking to include bars and workplaces with five or fewer employees.

Let's hope that the Idaho Legislature steps to the fore and tackles the issue in the 2010 session.