

Smoking policies examined locally, statewide

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Eastern student advocates and lawmakers alike are working to address the issues surrounding smoking.

On campus student leaders are working to ensure the current smoking policy is being enforced, as well as assessing the need for a stricter policy.

In one specific effort, the Student Government Association's (SGA) Student Rights Committee recently used chalk to mark off the 25-foot zone near campus building entrances and windows, said Sarah Carpenter, chair of the committee. Carpenter said the chalking event exposed her to the rules surrounding the ban.

"We're finding there are a lot of things we didn't know, so most likely students don't know either," Carpenter said. "What we want to do is have a concise message sent to all the students."

Because of the rules, Carpenter said most of campus is supposed to be smoke free as a result of how near walkways are to windows and building entrances. Carpenter said the Student Rights Committee isn't going to impose any unwanted policy on students and will use the Eastern Diagnosis Survey to determine the need for stricter enforcement or total campus wide ban, adding that she is neither for nor against it.

"It's something that will take time," Carpenter said. "Because of my role I have to work for the rights of all students. If students say they want a ban, we will explore it."

As of now Carpenter said the biggest issue is enforcement of the current rules.

At the statewide level, Rep. Julie Adams, R-Louisville, is co-sponsoring legislation that would ban smoking in public places across many students' hometowns in Kentucky. The smoking ban started as House Bill 190 and was sent back to the the House Health and Welfare committee Feb. 26. Now known as house Bill 289, the legislation will go to the full House to be voted on.

Adams said health reasons are the main focus for the smoking ban citing the state leading the nation in lung cancer, high Medicare and Medicaid costs and increasing workers compensation issues.

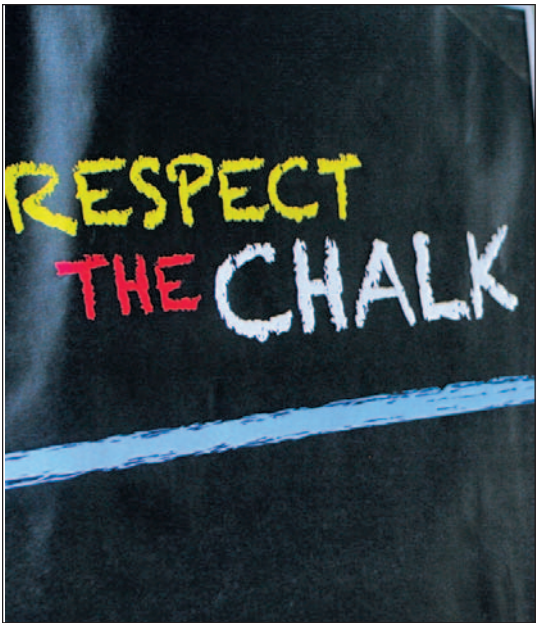
"People are always wary of change," Adams said. "I hope we can continue to educate people on the benefits of a smoke free workplace."

Adams said another component to the smoking ban issue is economics. She said restaurants and bars that have banned smoking report increased traffic

"We have seen a positive transformation in our cities," Adams said. "This has only [Louisville] enhanced our reputation as a friendly, open and hospitable city. I would like to see the rest of the state enjoy what we have here."

Rep. Susan Westrom, D-Lexington, who is also co-sponsoring the bill, told the Herald-Leader she didn't think the bill would see a vote this year because there weren't enough votes to pass through the Republican-controlled Senate, and all 100 members of the House are up for re-election. Adams said she is hopeful the bill will receive a vote this year and will push the bill next year if it does not happen.

"I think the biggest argument against it is private property rights," Adams said. "I think there's some merit to that, but at the same time we all succumb to regulations in our businesses. They do that to keep people healthy and safe."



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