

Health groups renew push to ban smoking at casinos

Written by Administrator
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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Kansas City health advocates have started a new push to get smoking banned at area casinos, but it's not going to be an easy fight in a competitive industry with lots of financial clout.

Clean Air Metro KC, a loose coalition of groups that include the American Cancer Society, [American Lung Association of Kansas City](#) and county health departments, wants all of metropolitan Kansas City to be smoke free.

The [Kansas City Star](#) (<http://bit.ly/Pu1CLD>) reported group members have been meeting with casino representatives and elected officials to urge them to support changes to state laws that allow smoking to continue on casino floors.

"I don't think people realize casinos still allow smoking. We want to get it on the radar," said [Joyce Morrison](#), spokeswoman for Clean Air Metro KC. "Our message to casinos: Smoke-free casinos are inevitable. We want to be able to have a conversation with you instead of fighting it out in legislative hearings."

The casino companies, however, have waged a furious fight to make their facilities one of the last bastions for public smoking in the Kansas City area.

When the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kan., was discussing a smoking ban in 2008, a company that was planning to build a casino at Kansas Speedway told government officials said such a ban would cause it to reconsider going forward with the project.

Then-Speedway President [Jeff Boerger](#) warned that banning smoking at Hard Rock Hotel and Casino — which was projected to generate about \$19 million a year for the county government — would put it at a competitive disadvantage because casinos across the river in Kansas City, Mo., allow patrons to smoke.

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County officials eventually approved the ban, but with an exclusion for casinos.

The Missouri casinos also put up stiff resistance when a smoking ban was making its way through local government. They pointed to sharp revenue drops in Illinois and Colorado after those states instituted smoking bans that included casinos in 2008.

Kansas City voters made bars and restaurants smoke-free that year, and a state law in Kansas did the same in 2010. Most municipalities in the metro area have similar rules, but the casinos are exempt.

As for voluntarily banning smoking, it's not likely any of the casinos would take a chance when others don't.

"We want a level playing field," said [Roxann Kinkade](#), corporate director of communications of Ameristar, which has a large Kansas City casino. "Until all the (gaming) floors are smoke-free, we will fight" to keep Ameristar open to smoking.

Local health advocates said some of the biggest victims of smoking in casinos are employees who are exposed to secondhand smoke every day.

Some casino workers have sued their employers, alleging that secondhand smoke was causing sore throats, dizziness, tightness in the chest and other symptoms. In Atlantic City, a nonsmoking former casino worker who claimed he got lung cancer because of exposure to smoke settled his suit against the casino for \$4.5 million.

The [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health](#) said it found that dealers studied at three Las Vegas casinos were three times as likely to have asthma symptoms as other adults in Nevada.

[JoAnne Chaney](#) of Overland Park, Kan., worked at a casino for nine years as a dealer before

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her doctor told her to quit when she started finding herself short of breath and sick to her stomach.

"When you're at the blackjack table all day, you can't tell me it's not doing any harm," Chaney said. "Having smoke blown at you for hours, it overcomes you."

Information from: The Kansas City Star, <http://www.kcstar.com>

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