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## Ban smoking in public?

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By KEITH UPCHURCH

[kupchurch@heraldsun.com](mailto:kupchurch@heraldsun.com); 419-6612



DURHAM -- Making Durham a healthier place by limiting people's exposure to secondhand smoke is a top reason the Durham County Health Department is proposing to ban smoking in many outdoor, public places.

The Durham County Board of Health recently approved the proposed smoking ban "because of what we now know about cigarette smoke," Gayle Harris, director of the Durham County Health Department, said.

"There are over 7,000 chemicals in cigarette smoke, and hundreds of those are hazardous, and probably close to 70 are known to cause cancer," Harris said.

The health department is accepting public comment on the proposal through June 15. The results will be presented to the Durham County Board of Commissioners, which will be asked to adopt the rule as an amendment to Durham's existing smoke-free ordinance.

The amendment would prohibit smoking indoors and outdoors at:

- All city and county property.
- City park system athletic fields and playgrounds.
- City and county bus stops.
- The Durham bus station downtown.
- Any sidewalk that is owned, leased or occupied by the city or county and abuts city or county grounds or hospital grounds.

The proposal goes well beyond Durham and state ordinances that currently prohibit smoking in many retail businesses but don't target outdoor locations.

But Harris said many people are being harmed by secondhand smoke at places like bus stops.

"When people are smoking in those areas and a bus pulls up and opens its doors, all the smoke billows right into the bus," she said. "So, people who aren't smoking are exposed."

The board also chose to ban smoking at playgrounds, city parks and athletic fields "because that's where kids and parents congregate, and we want to limit exposure for children, and increase positive role modeling so that kids don't see people smoking there."

As for enforcement, Harris said, the emphasis will be on helping citizens understand the law.

"We're hoping to do a lot of education," Harris said. "We're not expecting police officers to run around and ticket people for smoking."

Bill Burch, chairman of the Durham County Board of Health, said the 11-member board approved the new smoking ban rule unanimously, and noted that it does not apply to outdoor smoking at private businesses.

"The Board of Health is quite interested in improving the health of Durham County citizens," Burch said. "I think this will give an additional incentive to folks to rethink the habit, and hopefully stop smoking."

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