

The Anniston Star

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To be really smoke free

Editorial

Smoking is bad for you. That has been proven.

Tobacco companies have lied to the public. That has been proven. Tobacco companies have produced ads aimed at luring youngsters to their products. Clearly they have. And tobacco companies have manipulated their products to make them more addictive. Also proven.

Second-hand smoke is dangerous to nonsmokers. Proven as well.

Smoking and breathing second-hand smoke cost Alabama taxpayers millions in health-related expenses each year. True.

So what do you do to get people to quit hurting themselves and hurting others and costing the state (which is us) so much money?

Do you tax tobacco products to make them more expensive? Studies show that this works with teenage smokers who are just starting out but not with adult smokers who are hooked.

Ban tobacco products? A black market would quickly spring up.

Limit the places where a person can smoke? That one seems to work - both for the smoker and for the nonsmoker exposed to the fumes.

In 2003, Alabama lawmakers took a step toward creating smoke-free public spaces when they passed the Clean Indoor Air Act. Now state Sen. Vivian Davis Figures, D-Mobile, along with Alabama Faith United Against Tobacco and other church groups are pushing legislation that would impose a statewide ban on smoking in public places.

Many people think the idea is a good one, including restaurant owners who want customers to have a pleasant experience, something that smoking can and does hinder. The biggest opposition seems to come from those who own and operate bars, even though it has been pointed out that bars flourish in California and New York City, despite the fact that patrons cannot smoke in them.

We understand that people who want to smoke will smoke - somewhere, somehow. And some nonsmokers will breathe the secondhand smoke. But short of making it a felony to endanger nonsmokers (especially children) with their smoke and having smokers sign a release absolving taxpayers of any obligation to help them pay for smoking-related illnesses, their smoking will continue to have an impact on people other than themselves.

However, we can limit the physical damage smoking does to innocent nonsmokers by passing the ban that Figures proposes. We urge the Legislature to do just that.