

Daily Herald

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Blagojevich signs statewide indoor smoking ban

By Eric Krol
Daily Herald Political Writer

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Starting Jan. 1, smokers won't be able to light up inside restaurants, bars, offices, shopping malls and any other indoor public place anywhere in Illinois.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed a statewide smoking ban into law today as Illinois joins 21 other states in banning smoking in indoor public places.

"This law will save lives," Blagojevich said while signing the measure at Northwestern University's downtown campus. "The realities are that smoking kills people."

When it goes into effect, the state law will pre-empt 46 anti-smoking ordinances passed in the suburbs, Chicago and downstate. Smokers will have to go outside at least 15 feet from entrances, something already in effect in Arlington Heights. If they violate the law and are caught, they face fines between \$100 and \$250. Bars, restaurants and offices that violate the law by allowing smokers face similar fines, but the third violation in a year will carry a \$2,500 fine.

The measure was sponsored by state Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat, who stood by Blagojevich's side and held up his 1-year-old grandson Andrew, citing him as the reason he pushed the legislation.

"Illinois has passed the most restrictive law of any state in the United States and I am very proud of that," said Link, who fought back emotion during his remarks. "We were told by political spin doctors that we shouldn't do this because politically this was probably not the smartest thing to do...You only go around once and you've got to do the right thing. This was the right thing for life and this was the right thing for people."



(Photo illustration/photos.com)

Also attending was co-sponsoring Republican state Sen. Dan Cronin of Elmhurst. "This is about responsibility," Cronin said before the ceremony. "The moment the second-hand smoke evidence was in, the debate was over."

Dr. Eric Whitaker, the state's public health director, called it "a great day in public health." Anti-smoking advocates argue it will help reduce cases of cancer from second-hand smoke, asthma attacks and heart attacks.

Anti-smoking advocates who lead the Smoke Free Illinois campaign took what amounted to a victory lap after working to pass the legislation for two decades. And three women diagnosed with cancer from second-hand smoke told their stories. One was a Chicago bartender and waitress who is recovering from serious throat cancer.

The legislation's approval was a bit of a surprise this year in the General Assembly. Advocates credited Blagojevich's early support --- he said in the spring he'd sign the smoking ban if it reached his desk --- with helping the ban gain momentum.

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