



Police won't be staking out bars looking for smokers

By Christy Gutowski | Daily Herald Staff

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It's the end of a smoky era.

Some New Year's Eve revelers awoke this morning with an aching head, but perhaps their pillow cases smelled fresher.

At midnight, the much-debated indoor smoking ban that had so many people huffing and puffing became law, making it illegal to light up in just about any public place in Illinois.

Smokers are now forced to get their nicotine fix outside -- at least 15 feet from an entrance, exit or window. Business owners must post "No Smoking" signs, ditch ashtrays and report patrons who refuse to butt out.

But police aren't planning special smoking patrols. In fact, authorities across the suburbs said the new law will be enforced on a complaint-only basis.

"We won't have officers in the bars," said West Dundee Police Chief Dave Sawyer. "It will be on the honor system."

Huntley police Sgt. Kevin Hillner said officers have been "advised just to warn people at first."

With the new year, Illinois joins nearly two dozen other states that enacted indoor smoking bans. Smokers who don't comply here could be fined from \$100 to \$250, while businesses may face up to \$2,500 for habitual problems.

In most towns, the law will be enforced by police, city inspectors or code-enforcement officers. In Winfield, village officials plan to conduct some unannounced inspections, but they are not taking a heavy-handed approach.

"We're not looking to make any money off this new law," Winfield Village Manager William Barlow said. "Our philosophy is to first educate, then enforce."

Owners promise compliance, but they said it won't come cheap. In Fox Lake, just one minute from the Wisconsin border, village officials fear patrons will head across the border to drink and smoke in bars.

"We cannot and will not use our officers as smoking police," said Fox Lake Mayor Cindy Irwin. "If police are searching for a DUI driver or if there is a murderer on the loose, the police will not stop searching to answer a smoking call. We answer all calls, but there are some calls that take precedent over others."

Many towns, such as Arlington Heights, Palatine, Schaumburg and Wheaton, enacted local smoking bans months ago. Police said few citations were issued.

"People get used to it pretty quick," said Bob Haas, a Palatine deputy police chief. "People thought it was going to be a big challenge, but everyone adjusted. If we do get a complaint, we go out and talk to the

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businesses, but it's never been a problem."

At the Tap House Grill in Glen Ellyn, owner Danny Sronkoski continued a nonsmoking policy when he took over the place in September. He keeps an ashtray outside for his smoking patrons.

"We just kindly ask them to go outside and smoke," Sronkoski said. "I would never call the police; that's just not being a good neighbor to me."

There are still questions with the new law, including the liability of businesses, what required no-smoking signs must say, and whether the smoking ban applies to existing outdoor beer gardens.

The General Assembly's joint committee on administrative rules will meet Jan. 9 to try to clarify those questions. Meanwhile, the Illinois Department of Public Health is fielding calls from business owners asking for guidance.

Hours before the ban went into effect, many smokers were enjoying their last public puffs at the Charity Bingo Hall in Villa Park. Many were aware of the new law.

"I'm not a smoker, but I think this law is ridiculous," said Harriette Grek, 91, of Chicago. "I've seen a lot of changes in my life, but I've never seen the government step into our lives as much as they do now."

"I think it's fantastic," said Al Carius, a non-smoker from Naperville. "Ten years from now they'll laugh that they ever allowed smoking in public places."

Barbara Matousek, a smoker from Des Plaines, was less diplomatic.

"I'll go to Indiana," she said. "I think (this law) is stupid. They should have smoking and non-smoking areas."

• Staff writers Lee Filas, Jack Komperda, Hafsa Naz Mahmood, Jameel Naqvi, Kat Zeman and correspondent Gerard Dziuba contributed to this report.