

Smoking restricted in state buildings

Non-smokers rejoice; smokers say 'quit hassling us'

By LESLIE RATLEY
Of the Emerald

While some think House Bill 2423 is a blessing, others consider it just one more bureaucratic hassle. Either way, the Personnel Division of the State of Oregon is now required to adopt rules restricting smoking in places of employment operated by the state.

This policy charges agency administrators as of Jan. 1 with the responsibility of removing health hazards from the work environment. The action was sanctioned by recognized medical authorities who believe smoking is hazardous to the health and should therefore be "controlled and/or eliminated."

The legislation stipulates that non-smokers employed by the state no longer may be forced to work in a smokey area, and requires a smoke-free lounge area at specified times during the day for non-smoking employees.

Assistant Registrar Wanda Johnson, who is in charge of policy coordination, says the legislation is addressed to non-smokers. She stresses that at Oregon Hall smoker's rights are given equal consideration. Both groups have definite rights she says, as she attempts to accommodate everyone in policy formation.

However, at times this is difficult to accomplish given the "very emotional" issue of rights, Johnson says, the dilemma of only one lounge was temporarily solved by establishing an alternating smoking/non-smoking schedule for breaks and lunch.

Johnson emphasizes that no one should be forced to breathe smoke-filled air in a working space.

Journalism Prof. Jack Hart, a smoker, observes that "activist non-smokers who pass legislation of this sort" are not really helping the smokers. He views smoking as an addiction that should be treated like an addiction to any other drug; that is, the government should fund programs to cure smokers.

"Why doesn't the government quit hassling us and start helping us?" Hart asks. "The bill is just more bureaucratic hassle for offices, especially small ones with only a few rooms and both smokers and non-smokers. Take for instance the front office here (journalism school) with only two desks — what are they going to do if one person wants to smoke? Put up a fence?"

When this query was put to Ray Hawk, vice president of administration and finance at the University,

he responded "that in a situation like that, the smoker would have to wait until break time and then go somewhere else where it would not be offensive to anyone."

Many people have argued it is a smoker's right to smoke anywhere at any time, but the position of this bill and the University administration, according to Hawk, is "You can do whatever you want to yourself, but you have no right to do it to others. There is undeniable evidence handed down by the surgeon general that smoking is alien to good health, both for the smoker and the non-smoker who must breathe the air. Therefore, a smoker would have to smoke in a place where it would not be offensive to non-smokers."

Private offices, Hawk feels, complicate the problem if the occupant smokes. Smoking is allowed in private offices, but what happens when someone comes in who is offended by the fumes? Under this legislation, non-smokers no longer have to tolerate smoke, even in a private office. This is the aspect Hawk believes will be challenged in court.

The way Hawk has dealt with this legislation was not to hand down "blanket regulations." The department heads and deans were informed of the general regulations and the matter was left up to them to handle, according to the requirements of each area.

In most areas, there is only one lounge that must be shared by groups of smokers and non-smokers. Hawk says it was more reasonable for individual directors to coordinate specific policy for their department than to force conformity to one plan. While this policy of "grass roots delegation" won't produce a uniform University system, Hawk says, it will accomplish the goal of providing smoke free spaces in an equitable manner. He says the administra-



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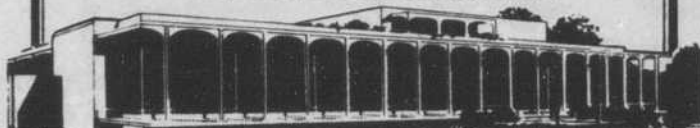
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