

Oregon's smokefree workplace law goes into effect January 1

OHSU deals with no-tolerance smoking policy

By Lee Perlman and Don Snedecor
The Southwest Portland Post

At the November meeting of the Multnomah Neighborhood Association, Erik Vidstrand reminded neighbors that Oregon's Smokefree Workplace Law, passed by the Oregon Legislature in July 2007, goes into effect on January 1, 2009. Vidstrand is the Multnomah County health educator in charge educating local businesses and the community about the new law.

According to Vidstrand, the law is designed to protect workers from secondhand smoke, which can cause life-threatening diseases including heart disease and lung cancer, as well as reduce the economic costs of tobacco-related health care.

While many of Multnomah County's workplaces already comply with the law, exemptions will be removed for bars, taverns, bowling centers, and bingo halls. Additionally smoking will be not be allowed within 10 feet of workplace entrances, exits, windows, and air vents.

In Multnomah Village, the new law will affect bars and taverns like The Ship and Renner's Grill. Additionally, all businesses are required to remove all ash trays and other containers for smoking debris from workplaces and

post "No Smoking within 10 feet" signs at all building entrances and exits.

According to Vidstrand, there will still be some exceptions. Outdoor smoking will be allowed as long as it is not within 10 ft of workplace entrances, exits, windows and air vents. Smoking will also be allowed in cigar bars and other businesses that cater exclusively to smokers.

But just because there is a smoke free workplace law, doesn't mean there aren't problems along the way.

Oregon Health and Sciences University is now officially a zero-tolerance no-smoking zone for staff, students, patients and visitors. Tobacco may not be consumed in any building or open area on campus.

Therefore, according to some Homestead neighborhood neighbors, the unofficial smoke-break area for some unregenerated staff members is their streets.

The policy began in September 2007, according to program manager Wendy Bjornson. To deal with the new rules, smokers were offered "a lot of choices," Bjornson told the Post.

Smokers could partake of free counseling and withdrawal programs, as well as nicotine gum and lozenges, which help reduce the craving for some. They simply couldn't light up on OHSU property.

According to Homestead Neighborhood Association chair Susan Egnor and board member Sue Donaldson, OHSU personnel have taken to wandering off campus to streets such as Southwest Gibbs and Grover and various trail heads and lighting up there.

They also leave their butts behind in copious amounts. Egnor told her board last month that she has written several letters to OHSU reflecting the concerns forwarded to her by neighbors. "I'm not offended by the individual smoker, but it's on such a grand scale," Egnor complained.

Bjornson said that OHSU has no enforcement authority over their employees' conduct outside the campus. "We've tried to remind them any number of times to be courteous and to clean up after themselves in the surrounding neighborhood. For the most part, they've been pretty cooperative. Some have not been."

She added, "We've been working with the neighborhood association, started to do some strategizing, trying

to see where the difficulty is cropping up."

Another OHSU official said, "It's a great program, just hard to enforce." Homestead board member Rich Davidson suggested that OHSU could simply refuse to report violations of the law by calling 1-866-621-6107 or completing an online form at www.dhs.state.us.

The Multnomah County Tobacco Prevention and Education Program follows up on complaints to determine if there has been a violation and to assist employers in meeting the requirements of the law. Fines for on-going non-compliance are issued by the Oregon Department of Human Services.

To find out more about the state law, visit www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/smokefree/index.shtml.

No smoking
within 10 feet



Under Oregon's Smokefree Workplace Law this business is smokefree (ORS 433.835-870, effective January 1, 2009). Smoking is not allowed within 10 feet of building entrances, exits, windows and air intake vents.

For information and complaints:
1-866-621-6107 or www.healthoregon.org/smokefree

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