



Thank you for NOT Smoking

By Shirley S. Shin

Smokers beware. The next time you light up in Santa Monica, you could be breaking the law. The city has taken the smoking ban to the streets—Third Street Promenade to be exact—along with most other outdoor venues. Shirley Shin reports.

Following in the footsteps of Calabasas, Santa Monica has decided to stamp out smoking in most public places, including Farmers Markets, outdoor restaurants and service areas like ATM machines, bus stops and movie theater lines.

The city's decision came after a report by the California Air Resources Board that officially classified tobacco smoke as a "toxic air contaminant." But some people don't see how smoking in an open-air area poses a health risk for pedestrians.

"I sympathize with people if they are in a room and somebody is smoking, but you are in the open. This is a street!" said John Zahr, who took a cigarette break behind the hot dog stand where he works. "The amount of smoke that comes out of a cigarette to pollute or cause any hazards to people, I think, it's miniscule."

As one of Southern California's most popular tourist destinations, the promenade receives more than 30,000 visitors every weekend. And Zahr worries that the stringent laws may deter visitors from coming.

"A lot of tourists come from Europe and most of them are smoking," said Zahr. "Businesses in the restaurants will be very bad...they're going to lose a lot of customers because people like to have a cigarette after they finish their meal."

But Kathleen Rawson, executive director of Bayside District Corporation, a management company that oversees Downtown Santa Monica, said it's too early to tell how business will be affected.

She is concerned that the ban will make smokers feel like second-class citizens. "Cigarettes are not a controlled substance...it's really criminalizing someone just walking down the street."

Under the new law, smokers can only light up in alleyways and at every cross street off the promenade.

Zahr said the solution doesn't make sense. "If they have to go behind the alley and smoke it, what about the air over there? I don't know how clean [the air will be] here compared to a block down the road on Santa Monica Boulevard."

The law will go into effect on Thanksgiving Day, after which the city will grant a four-month grace period for smokers to get acquainted with the new rules.