

Smoking

in

A.A. Meetings:

LEGAL OR NOT ?

On October 1st, 2007, the Minnesota “Freedom to Breathe” smoking rules go into effect. What does this mean for A.A. meetings across the state ?

Q: Smoking is illegal in “public places” and “public meetings.” But can we allow smoking in our *closed* AA group?

A: According to the state Department of Health, under the new Freedom to Breathe rules all indoor meetings must legally be “non-smoking” as of October 1st, 2007.

Q: Our group meets in a private club. Can we still allow smoking ?

A: According to the state Department of Health, all private clubs are covered by the new smoking rules, including Alano clubs, VFW halls, Knights of Columbus halls, etc.

The Minnesota Department of Health staff believe that smoking is illegal in all meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous that occur indoors. Outdoor meetings are not covered by the new rules.

As per Tradition 10, Intergroup has no opinion on outside issues, including whether a meeting allows smoking or not. However, as many groups will have questions about this issue, we contacted the Minnesota Department of Health to get their view of the law, so that we can make this easily available to our groups.

To find out whether any indoor AA meetings might legally allow smoking, we asked this: If a meeting is “closed,” (i.e., available to A.A. members only) and held in a private club (such as an Alano club or other A.A. meeting place), can smoking be allowed? Will VFW halls, Elks’ lodges and Knights of Columbus halls be covered by these new rules? We’re told that all of these locations are covered by the new non-smoking rules.

**For more info, call St. Paul AA Intergroup, (651) 227 - 5502
or see <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/mciaa/>**

Freedom to Breathe FAQs

The *Freedom to Breathe* amendments to the Minnesota Clean Indoor Air Act go into effect on October 1, 2007. The purpose of the law is to protect employees and the public from the health hazards of secondhand smoke.

Frequently Asked Questions on provisions in the Minnesota Clean Indoor Air Act:

Are private businesses covered by the law?

Yes. Work places where there are two or more employees must be smoke-free by 10-1-07.

Are designated smoking areas and/or indoor "smoking rooms" in businesses and other public places prohibited?

Yes. By 10-1-07 smoking rooms and designated smoking areas need to be phased out.

Are meetings such as AA or NA covered by the law?

Yes. If these meetings are held indoors, smoking is not allowed.

What are the responsibilities of proprietors?

In general, they are required to:

- Post "No Smoking" signs at or near all public entrances;

- Ask persons who smoke in prohibited areas to refrain from smoking or require the person to leave the facility if they refuse to refrain from smoking;

- Refrain from providing ashtrays and other smoking equipment;

- Withhold service for noncompliant patrons.

Are there provisions in the law about smoking outside?

No. The Minnesota Clean Indoor Air Act does not regulate smoking outside of buildings regardless of the distance from a building or building opening. Property owners may create restrictions regarding

smoking areas outside of their buildings on their property. Some counties and cities do prohibit smoking within a certain distance of building entrances and at parks and recreation areas.

Can cities and counties pass stronger smoking regulations?

Yes. Local governments can adopt more stringent measures to protect individuals from secondhand smoke.

Are there penalties if a proprietor allows smoking in areas prohibited by the law?

Yes. Any proprietor or person who owns or operates the use of the area in which smoking is prohibited and knowingly fails to comply with the law is guilty of a petty misdemeanor. The Minnesota Department of Health also has the authority to take enforcement actions that may include monetary penalties up to \$10,000. Local public health agencies may also impose fines, license suspensions or revocations.

What can I do if I observe a violation?

If you observe a violation of the Minnesota Clean Indoor Air Act you should notify management of the facility and ask that corrective action be taken. If you feel that the situation is not resolved please contact the Minnesota Department of Health at 651-201-4601 or by e-mail at

mciaa@mnhealth.state.mn.us. MDH also has a "Compliance Assistance Letter" available for the public to use at:

www.health.state.mn.us/freedomtobreathe

For information about smoke-free air or to receive free signs contact:

Smoke-Free Ramsey

2395 University Ave West #310

Saint Paul, MN 55114 651-646-3005

Betsy Brock at bb@ansrmn.org

www.smokefreeramsey.org