

Municipalities urged to ban smoking on outdoor patios

By Jeff Nagel - Maple Ridge News - March 29, 2008

Smoking on restaurant and bar patios will be the next thing banned if Fraser Health's chief medical health officer gets his way.

Roland Guasparini is asking municipalities across the region to step in and outlaw patio puffing themselves to add more bite to the province's new smoke-free policy.

Pitt Meadows has already done so, while Maple Ridge is looking into it.

The new provincial rules, which take effect Monday, will shut down ventilated smoking rooms in bars and restaurants, ban smokers from lighting up within three metres of entryways and restrict the display of cigarettes and advertising.

But Guasparini said Victoria should have gone farther yet and banned patio smoking at the same time.

"It should have been a no brainer for the government to do it," he said.

In the absence of action from Victoria, the issue is in the hands of local governments.

Victoria has already banned patio smoking and Vancouver has also passed a bylaw but not yet implemented the ban.

The request to cities has been signed by all Fraser Health medical health officers.

"We're hoping that municipalities in our area will follow the lead of Victoria and Vancouver," Guasparini said. "In the Lower Mainland, I think we're ready for it."

He said the health of young servers is threatened because smoke clouds don't easily dissipate, especially in the many patios that are semi-enclosed.

He noted there's already wide support among cities to take action.

The Union of B.C. Municipalities last year urged the province to ban patio smoking after member cities endorsed a resolution spearheaded by Port Moody and White Rock.

Guasparini also wants cities to widen the no-smoke zone around public doorways and air intakes to 7.5 metres from three metres, which he said isn't sufficient.

Lower Mainland Local Government Association president Bob Long, a Langley Township councillor, said area cities will now reconsider the issue at the LMLGA annual meeting in May.

"The intent is to try to come up with a level playing field," Long said.

Without an attempt at coordination, the fear is cities will enact different bylaws leading

to a confusing patchwork of rules across the region.

“I think it’s going to be confusing to the public, especially tourists,” Long said.

Guasparini is also predicting there will be increasing pressure from condo and apartment dwellers demanding authorities crack down on smokers whose fumes waft from balcony to balcony.

The new provincial ban on smoking in public areas covers common areas of apartment buildings, and he thinks it could be argued that definition covers the air around nearby balconies.

The hit list for anti-smoking campaigners doesn’t stop there.

The Clean Air Coalition of B.C. also wants smoking banned in parks and beaches and in cars with children present.

The group is also calling for higher tobacco taxes, subsidized nicotine replacement therapy and a ban on selling cigarettes in pharmacies.

Guasparini said he supports the group’s 11-point campaign.