

Sonoma County bans smoking in apartments and condos

Ordinance to take effect next year

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Sonoma County supervisors unanimously approved a resolution Tuesday that will ban smoking inside apartments and condominiums in the county's jurisdiction. The ordinance was part of a larger anti-smoking package that seeks to bring the county in line with cities like Sebastopol that have strict smoking prohibitions.

A vote on a proposal that would have banned smoking on county property and unenclosed areas such as restaurant and bar patios was delayed until October to give food and beverage businesses more time to brace for the change. "This is a major step forward in protecting the health of all residents and visitors to Sonoma County," Mark Netherda, the county interim public health officer, said after the vote.

The ordinance will prohibit smoking in any existing multi-unit residence beginning in 16 months. It will ban smoking in new units, as well as those rented for residential use for the first time, in 8 months. Second District Supervisor David Rabbitt, while he lauded efforts to prohibit second-hand smoke, raised concerns over the county regulating what residents have a right to do in their own homes.

Rabbitt, an architect, argued that he had yet to see scientific evidence that second-hand smoke could travel from one apartment or condominium unit to another unless there are open windows or outdated, shared ventilation systems.

Lynn Walton, manager of the Healthy Communities section of the Sonoma County Public Health Division, cited a number of studies, including a recent study by a Stanford researcher who found that the level of hazardous tobacco chemicals in a non-smoker's San Jose condominium was as high as one would find in a casino.

A separate part of the anti-smoking package sought to prohibit smoking in open areas, including county-owned property and public and private property in the county's unincorporated areas. During the meeting's public comment period, Peter Hackett, owner of Stumptown Brewery in Guerneville, asked the board for more time to notify his patrons about the ban on smoking in open areas of bars and restaurants.

Supervisors agreed to delay implementation of the smoking prohibitions as they apply to food and beverage businesses until June 1 of next year. The board also proposed coming up with a detailed implementation and education campaign. The change required an amendment to the ordinance, which will be voted on by the supervisors in early October.

"This is a valid compromise as long as the county performs its duty in educating the public on the introduction of this ordinance, which effectively bans outdoor tobacco smoke at food and beverage establishments," Hackett said.

Facts: Sonoma County Smoking Ordinance

Under the smoking ordinance, which takes effect next year, smoking will be prohibited in apartment complexes and other multiunit housing areas, such as indoor and outdoor common areas, including halls, paths, lobbies, courtyards, elevators, stairwells, community rooms, playgrounds, gym facilities, pools, garages, parking lots, shared restrooms, shared laundry rooms, common cooking areas and shared eating areas. Smoking may be allowed in specially designated areas.