


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No smoking in county parks? Miami-Dade asks visitors not to light up - Miami-Dade officials are asking people not to smoke in parks popular among children. But no one will get a ticket for breaking the rule.

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The Miami-Dade parks department wants to stop people from smoking at more than 40 county parks that attract large numbers of kids.

The county has put up sign at the parks, and since Jan. 11, county workers have been told to ask smokers not to light up.

But because of a 1985 state law, all the county can do is ask. The Florida Clean Indoor Air Act says that counties can't ban smoking outdoors. Since the new rules are just a policy and not a law, county commissioners did not sign off on the action, a parks spokeswoman said.

For now, the ban covers only certain parks that attract numerous kids, or about 20 percent of the county's 195 parks.

Although the policy will not be enforced, signs encouraging park-goers not to smoke were installed as early as the beginning of last summer.

Universities such as Florida International University and the University of Florida recently banned outdoor smoking on campus. The state smoking law prohibits counties from regulating outdoor smoking, but it doesn't say anything about universities. FIU issues tickets to students or visitors who are caught smoking, even in a car parked in a campus garage.

Miami-Dade Parks and Recreation representatives hope that although not a law, the policy will still raise awareness and help smokers be more courteous to non-smokers.

Allison Diego, assistant director of the parks department, said the policy started as a request from the county Health Department.

Diego said the Health Department received a disease-prevention grant from the Center for Disease Control. Some of the money was given to the parks department and used to purchase tobacco-free signs.

"We chose high traffic parks with kids at play," Diego said. "There is no enforcement, but our staff has been informed to let people know to refrain from smoking."


Kelly Fiume brings her daughter Alexa, 1, to play at Continental Park in Kendall every week. Although she smokes, she refrains from smoking around the playground and believes the signs are a good idea.


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"I've seen kids pick up cigarette butts and choke on them," Fiume said. "So yeah, I think they're a good idea."

Monica Hayes, a Kendall resident brings her daughter Amanda, 7, to ride her bike at the park. She also supports the no-smoking policy

"It's a great idea. There should not be people smoking cigarettes where people are exercising," Hayes said.

Valeria Pinto, also of Kendall, takes her two sons, Joao, 9, and Lucas, 5, to skateboard at Kendale Lakes Park about three times a week. She hopes the signs will help people be more considerate.

"I hope the signs stop it," Pinto said. "The other day I was running and a guy was smoking behind me. I wanted to tell him to please go on the street."

Felix Abreu also goes running in the park often, but believes the signs aren't enough.

"I think it's a great idea, but I don't think it will work because there is no patrolling," Abreu said. "I never see the patroller get out of his car."

The policy was put into place to "ensure a healthy environment for people participating in sports and other recreational activities within a park setting where they are not exposed to toxic secondhand smoke," according to a press release from the parks department.

According to a special report by the American Heart Association on the cardiovascular effects of second-hand smoke, simply being around other people smoking for as little as 20 minutes increases the risk of coronary heart disease. Being exposed daily can increase the risk by up to 30 percent.

A 2010 Surgeon General's report also concluded that there is no safe level of secondhand smoke, and that it contains over 70 chemicals that are likely to cause cancer.

The parks where the new policy was put into place are scattered throughout the county and include any place with a "Fit to Play" after-school program.

"We have also talked about installing signs at all playgrounds and are looking at doing that now," Diego said.

Esther Valladares brings her sons Adrian, 10, and Gabriel, 8, to Continental Park to play baseball and believes the signs are meant as an example for the younger generation.

"I think they make children aware that it's not the right thing to do," Valladares said.

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