

## **Ban on smoking debated in Mon County – 4/9**

### **By Emily Corio**

**Anchor:** The Monongalia County Board of Health is considering amending its smoking regulations to include a ban on smoking in all indoor public places. The County is one of eight that still allows smoking in restaurants and bars. The proposal is controversial---some bar owners want to be excluded from the ban, while others see the ban as inevitable. Emily Corio reports.

**Corio:** According to Christina Mickey, of Smoke Free West Virginia, Monongalia Co. used to have the toughest smoking regulations in the state. That was back in 1993.

**Mickey:** They were the very first county in this state to pass a clean indoor air regulation. The city of Morgantown was actually the leader, as they were the first entity in the state to adopt any clean indoor air regulation, and the county board followed suit.

**Corio:** All 55 counties in WV have some form of indoor smoking regulations, but Mickey says Monongalia Co. Health Board is no longer a leader.

**Mickey:** It's interesting in a community that is, that provides some of the best medical services in the state, it is surprising to see that this county has one of the least protective regulations in the state.

**Corio:** Mickey says normally in areas where there's a significant number of people who have higher education and make decent money, the regulations are tighter. But, despite the University-town culture and in a way, because of it, the regulations haven't changed in Morgantown and Monongalia Co. A few WVU students and their professor were eating lunch on the patio at the WV Brewing Company. Student, Caleb Lemley, says the smoke doesn't bother him and he doesn't think about the health effects of being exposed to cigarette smoke.

**Lemley:** I used to chew tobacco for eight years. I just quit six months ago, so I am recovering from nicotine addiction, but most of my friends chew, and that doesn't bother me. I think they should be allowed to do that in public, so I think if people want to smoke, that doesn't bother me. Maybe as I get older my opinion will change.

**Corio:** That's what happened for Lemley's professor, Matt Wilson.

**Wilson:** As I've gotten older, I definitely like to go into places that aren't full of smoke. It would be a positive for me. I would support it. Now whether they can come up with exceptions that are productive, the reality is that a lot of bars serve food and there are places people don't go because they're real smoky.

**Corio:** The WV Brewing Company allows smoking at the bar, but not in the dining room. Owner and brewer, Ned Strauser, says he understands both sides of the issue, he thinks the health argument will probably win.

**Strauser:** There's a lot of things that people have realized, 'hey, this is really a better way to be about life and living.' It's just inevitable that it's going in this direction, so we're certainly prepared for it. You know, we've tried to make this place a safer and healthier place as far as the ingredients that we're using and the oil that we use. It's not the trans fat, etc. So maybe it's just more of a logical step for us.

**Corio:** But it's out-of-step for other bar owners. A group called the Monongalia County Bar and Video Lottery Association submitted a revised smoking ban proposal at the Board of Health's last meeting. Its proposal would allow smoking in bars, video lottery rooms, and outdoor seating areas at restaurants, but it would prohibit smoking in a car with children present and the rail trail, a paved walkway along the Monongahela River.

The Monongalia County Board of Health holds its next regular meeting at the end of May, but a special meeting on the smoking ban may be called before then. Requests for interviews with Board of Health members were not answered.

For West Virginia Public Broadcasting, I'm Emily Corio in Morgantown.