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News

City a breath of fresh air

By Jeremy Oberstein

BURBANK — When the American Lung Assn. of California on Monday released its first report card rating cities in Los Angeles and Orange counties on how well they control second-hand smoke, Burbank was one of only three to get an A.

Burbank got top marks because of an ordinance passed in 2007 that limits smoking in downtown, parks, outdoor dining areas and walkways, said Michael McManus, the city's public information officer.

Of the 88 cities in Los Angeles County and 34 in Orange County, only Burbank, Baldwin Park and Calabasas earned the top mark.

"This is a great thing," McManus said. "We've taken some positive if controversial steps to clean our air."

Burbank's ordinance against smoking was adopted by the council in March 2007 by a 3-2 vote.

The ban was intended to limit the exposure of second-hand smoke in Downtown Burbank, the Chandler Bikeway and outdoor dining areas. It also includes all city facilities and parks, including De Bell Municipal Golf Course.

The lung association ranked communities on a sliding scale in six categories: recreation areas, outdoor dining, entryways, service areas, housing and youth tobacco licensing.

Only Calabasas, which also has a second-hand smoke ordinance in its municipal code, received a perfect 20 points, with Burbank and Baldwin Park two points behind.

Burbank could have increased its score had the city implemented a more restrictive ban on smoking in housing establishments, said Steven Gallegos, smoke-free advocacy and programs director for the association.

"Burbank got a D in the housing category because they restrict smoking in indoor common areas and not outdoors or in all apartment buildings," he said.

Neighboring cities did not fare as well in the association's report card.

Glendale, which has less restrictive anti-smoking measures than Burbank, received 11 out of a possible 20 points, and Pasadena got 8 points. Both received C grades.

Mayor Marsha Ramos, who voted for the ordinance in March, was pleased that Burbank was in elite company.

"To be one of the only ones to get an A, I'm so pleased," she said. "This has positioned us in a

very favorable place to create an environment that is smoke-free.”

While the report was praised by some, others said the high grade should not send a message that Burbank’s air is as clean as it could be.

“Burbank continues to struggle with smog,” said Councilman David Gordon, who opposed the ordinance in March. “Individually, I’m sure some people are pleased, but this [recognition] is insignificant in terms of the overall public health improvements. I don’t know of any improvements in terms of our overall air quality.

But McManus contends that banning smoking is a step in the right direction toward improving the air quality.

“We are a city at the convergence of two of the busiest freeways in the country,” he said. “Our air is dependent on that.

“On an individual basis, as you go about your business, [not smoking] does make a difference.”
