

Published Friday, August 24, 2007 11:09 PM PDT

Opinion

EDITORIAL: It's time to stop blowing smoke in public places

No butts about it, a smoking ban in public spaces should be a matter of when, not if, in Glendale.

We all have the right to share public space without breathing in the 250 known toxic chemicals — 50 of which are known to cause cancer — that the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention says are contained in second-hand tobacco smoke.

And that right should not have to come down to the nonsmoker simply having to move somewhere else to get away from the smoke.

It is time for Glendale, like its neighbors in Burbank and several other cities in Los Angeles County have done, to endorse that right by banning smoking in public places like outdoor dining areas, city parks and facilities, public transportation areas and outdoor events.

To not do it, in the midst of the momentum gained for similar ordinances in Burbank and Calabasas, would be to not take advantage of the current political will and determination to make a ban happen.

Even in Glendale, the momentum is here.

Gradually, over the last year, that momentum has manifested itself in a proposed ordinance requiring local store owners to have a city permit to sell tobacco products, and face a revoked permit if retailers are caught three times in five years selling to minors.

The beefed-up retailer ordinance comes after a 2006 study that found that 24% of Glendale retailers were “ready and willing” to sell cigarettes and similar products to children.

Officials send mixed messages when through such an ordinance they tacitly acknowledge the safety hazards of tobacco smoke to children, yet drag their heels on a more expansive law that would protect everyone.

Mayor Ara Najarian's actions are also encouraging. After initially resisting the idea of a smoking ban, he said he would consider starting a discussion of the idea on the dais.

The time for that discussion has come. And it should include not only proponents of the ban — who have e-mailed and petitioned the council and written en masse to this paper in support of a law — but also opponents, who have likewise written to defend their right to smoke in public.

It is a fine line between the protection of individual liberties and the infringement of someone else's. But it is disingenuous in this city to have an ordinance that prohibits smoking within 25 feet of park playgrounds, but no law that protects anyone in any public space.

Smokers, by all means, have the right to smoke. It is a right that comes with the blessings of living

in a land where the pursuit of happiness includes the right to owning your own property.

But that's where polluted air belongs — in private spaces, away from others, who have a competing right to not breathe pollutants in a public space.

Opponents could suggest that we also ban cars and factories, which also pollute the air we breathe.

But let's take it one breath at a time.