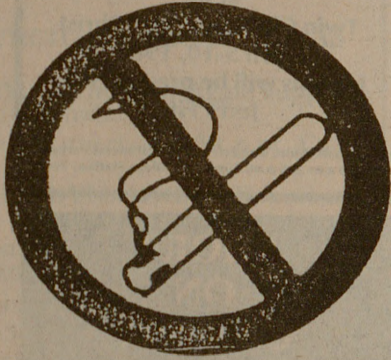


State and Local

Texans may have to puff in private

Bill could restrict public smoking

By Christi Daugherty
Staff Writer



Hold on tight to those cigarettes, and enjoy them while it's legal. The Legislature is in session.

The Texas Senate has approved and passed to committee a bill that would considerably limit tobacco smoking in public.

The Texas Smoke-Free Indoor Act, the bill sponsored by Sen. Chet Brooks, D-Pasadena, carries the endorsement of the American Cancer Society, which also claims credit for originating the idea.

As written, the bill would prohibit smoking in most indoor areas except designated smoking space. The bill excludes bars, tobacco shops and restaurants with under a 25-person capacity. These smaller areas would be allowed to permit smoking in their entire establishments.

Lisa McGiffert, a legislative aide in Brooks' office, said the bill is now in a House committee, and although it passed the Senate smoothly, things are now starting to look rocky.

She said the bill was not sent to the committee where Brooks had expected it to go, and it is having trouble getting a hearing.

"We're definitely disappointed it didn't make it to the Public Health Committee," McGiffert said. "We certainly feel that it's a

health issue. It will definitely have a rough ride over there (in the House)."

She said the idea of such a bill was recommended two years ago by the Legislative task force on cancer, and Brooks sponsored a similar bill last year that failed.

"We've worked for two years with people who oppose the idea as well as those who support it, trying to come up with a bill everyone can live with," she said.

Cindy Morgan, the media affairs coordinator for the American Cancer Society's Texas division in Austin, said the Cancer Society is part of a coalition that wrote the bill.

"We have a directive out of our national office to work as part of a coalition with the Heart & Lung

Association for a clean air bill," Morgan said.

The bill is necessary, she added, because studies have proven that non-smokers who associate frequently with smokers also suffer health problems commonly associated with smoking.

"There are a lot of people out there who consider it an irritation or an aggravation to be around the smoke," she said. "But now the surgeon general came out with the fact that involuntary smoking, or passive smoking, exists. In fact, family members and children of smokers have a higher incidence of smoke-related illnesses than the average population."

"Since the U.S. surgeon general came out with this evidence, we're being taken more seriously."

Bryan-College Station Rep. Richard Smith said he hadn't yet read the bill, but that he'd heard of it, and tentatively agreed with most of its precepts.

"I support the protection of people's rights not to smoke if they don't want to, but also I want to protect the rights of those who smoke — I wouldn't want to interfere with their rights," Smith said.

The bill would allow smoking in an individual's private office, or in designated smoking areas,

but prohibits smoking in the open office environment favored by many companies.

This has been an area of dissonance among detractors of the bill, and Smith wondered if the bill properly solved that problem.

He suggested offices develop designated smoking areas where smokers could retreat for a periodic puff.

"Teachers have been doing it this way for years," Smith said. "I'll bet all the way through grade school you never saw your teachers with a cigarette. And I'll guarantee you a lot of them smoked."

Ben Hardeman, a Bryan city councilman who in the past has been known to oppose similar legislation, favorably compared the bill to the smoking ordinances that passed the Bryan Council last year.

"It sounds similar to the ordinance they have in Bryan, and naturally I would be in favor of it," Hardeman said. "While I would not try to prohibit anyone from smoking, I think non-smokers deserve the right to clean air as much as smokers deserve the right to smoke."

Smith said the best thing about the bill is that it establishes a uniform state law, which is preferable to the current situations of local ordinances that differ from city to city.

A&M prof's research helps paralyzed males in fathering children

By Kellie Copeland
Reporter

Most young men who suffer spinal-cord injuries lose not only the use of their arms and legs, but also the ability to become a father.

But paralyzed men now have the chance to father children, thanks to a technique originally developed for endangered species by a Texas A&M professor of veterinary medicine.

Stephen Seager, director of the Wildlife and Exotic Animal Center, has collaborated with doctors at the University of Michigan Medical Center, the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Washington, D.C. and the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston to collect sperm from about 80 paralyzed men by using a technique called electroejaculation — a process in which a low-voltage electrical probe is used to stimulate ejaculation. The sperm then can be collected and used for artificial insemination.

The wives of five paraplegics have been impregnated successfully using the technique; the first baby is due in August and the second in October.

These pregnancies, Seager says, are the first reported in the United States involving paraplegics and quadriplegics who are unable to have sexual intercourse.

Only 2 percent to 3 percent of some 10,000 to 15,000 American men who suffer spinal-cord injuries each year ever regain the ability to ejaculate, Seager says. The rest are

left infertile because their injury blocks signals from the brain.

"These statistics are especially tragic because 80 percent of paraplegics are males between the age of 18 and 27," Seager says.

"It's very tragic to see these young men become paralyzed," he says. "Some can only move their heads."

"One of the first things some of them have been told is that they will never be able to father children."

— Professor Stephen Seager

One of the first things some of them have been told is that they will never be able to father children.

"Spinal-cord injury is really a male disease. Women are usually more careful. The injuries almost always happen because of motorcycle, diving or gunshot accidents."

Most of the paralyzed young men are married or end up getting married, Seager says. "Many times they marry their nurses," he says.

Paraplegics wanting children commonly have resorted to sperm banks or adoption.

Electroejaculation also may help young men who have had surgery for testicular cancer, Seager says.

Seager developed electroejaculation in his pioneering work with wild and endangered animals such as gorillas, giant pandas, leopards, rhinoceroses, chimpanzees and dolphins. The technique has enabled him to collect sperm from anesthetized animals for analysis and artificial insemination.

"This work wasn't destined for humans, it was destined for the propagation of animals," he says. "Mankind was a purely secondary benefactor."

Staff parking spaces behind Reed McDonald reassigned by vandals

Someone decided it was about time the staff parking lot behind the Reed McDonald Building be repainted with assigned spots for The Battalion staff members, but many Texas A&M University staff members didn't find any humor in the prank.

Director of University Police Bob Wiatt Tuesday said, "We've been receiving calls from irate people all morning. Two of them called me personally."

Sometime in the wee hours of Tuesday

morning, parking spaces reserved for the journalism department head, journalism professors, printing center employees and other A&M staff members were painted over and reassigned, by job title, to several Battalion staff members.

Wiatt said the act was criminal mischief and it will be investigated.

An investigation will be conducted and if the person or persons responsible are found,

class A misdemeanor charges will be filed, Wiatt said.

He added that a class A misdemeanor is punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$2,000 fine.

"Grounds maintenance people estimate the damage to the parking lot to be at least \$400," he said.

He said some of the people who called UPD this morning want to see someone punished for the vandalism.

Officers took pictures of the parking lot and questioned a couple of journalism students who said they didn't know anything about the incident, he said.

Wiatt said from September of 1986 to March 31, 285 parking tickets had been issued in the approximate 35-space lot.

"Since the spaces in the lot are reserved, we usually don't even go into that lot unless there is a complaint," he said.

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