

Fanning the Flames

Smokers still searching for peace; Nonsmokers still searching for clean air

BY MELISSA PANTANO
The Battalion

A student just gets out of a test. After putting away her number two pencil, she reaches into her backpack for that heavenly cancer stick.

As she lights up, the anxiety seems to flow out of her body until a fanatical nonsmoker walks by coughing and hacking while staring at her.

Students at A&M have a problem sharing parking space, let alone air space, but smokers and nonsmokers are still at odds about a common solution, with no solution in sight.

Robin Nester, a senior horticulture major, said smoking is his prerogative.

"It's a person's right to smoke," Nester said. "People eat unhealthy foods — they can get cancer or heart disease that way too."

Allen Coker, a senior finance major, said smoking is his prerogative.

"If you don't like the smoke, move somewhere else," Coker said. "If I want to kill myself slowly, it's my business."

Greg Simmons, a freshman chemical engineering major, said smokers do not really bother him.

"I don't know what people make such a big deal about," Simmons said. "I'm kind of used to it."

Simmons said he used to smoke when he was younger but later quit.

"I didn't really enjoy it and it was a costly habit," he said.

Dr. Ken Phenow, associate medical director of Scott and White Clinic's health plan and director of the Urgent Care Clinic said smoking is a dangerous habit.

"Young people in general think that they are immortal," Phenow

said. "Their health is good, and until something comes and knocks you over the head, people aren't going to think differently."

"People don't understand that smoking will hurt their health," Phenow said. "You hear cancer or heart disease but don't listen. Unless you have seen someone die of emphysema, you can't understand."

"If you don't like the smoke, move somewhere else."

— Allen Coker
smoker

But some smokers think that there are worse demons than the "Marlboro Man."

"People make a lot of choices," Nester said. "Smoking is not the worst one you can make. I'd rather smoke a pack of cigarettes than drink and drive."

There are many different theories as to why people start the habit.

"College-aged kids usually start smoking because of one of three reasons," Phenow said. "Either because their parents smoked, secondly because they have addictive personalities or thirdly new studies show that there might be a genetic tendency for some people to take more risks than others."

"The trend in recent years has been that more college-aged women have started smoking," Phenow said. "Also, more women are starting to die from the smoking related diseases that used to be seen as only affecting males."

Nester said she started smoking because of peer pressure.

"It started as a social thing," Nester said "I just wanted to see what the big deal was."

The main barrier between smokers and nonsmokers is fear of secondhand smoke.

Phenow said nonsmokers can inhale the same amount smokers do in certain situations.

"If a nonsmoker sits in a bar, from lets say 8:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. they would have inhaled enough secondhand smoke as if they would have smoked five or six cigarettes themselves. The number and the damage increases if the nonsmoker is sitting around smokers."

Nester said she has had some people overreact when she was smoking in public.

"Once, I was smoking outside a store where I worked with some friends of mine," Nester said.

"A woman walked out of the store, coughing, covering her mouth with her shirt and being really obnoxious about the fact she didn't appreciate that we were smoking around her. Then, she got into her old diesel Mercedes, rolled down the windows and practically blew everyone else away with her exhaust."

Simmons said recent laws passed in California that ban smoking indoors are appropriate.

"I don't like getting smoke blown all over me while I'm eating," Simmons said.

Nester said she reserves her right to smoke in public, despite what others might think.

"Forget that," Nester said. "I like to smoke when I drink."



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