

Stricter smoking rules eyed

Cohen says moratorium had ended on Clean Air Act

BY OLIVIA WINSLOW
AND TYLER WHITLEY

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITERS

The Environmental Protection Agency's latest report on second-hand smoke prompted one member of the Virginia General Assembly to consider pushing for stricter regulations on smoking in public.

Del. Bernard S. Cohen, D-Alexandria, author of the Clean Air Act, which restricted smoking in restaurants and other public facilities, said yesterday he plans to introduce more restrictive anti-smoking legislation.

He said he plans to distribute the EPA finding on secondary smoke to every legislator.

Cohen said he may seek legislation that would prohibit air circulatory systems in workplace smoking areas from recirculating the air through the workplace.

When the Clean Air Act was adopted, anti-smoking and tobacco industry lobbyists agreed not to change the law for two years. Cohen said that moratorium has expired.

The EPA's report also noted the

danger that secondhand smoke poses to children.

Operators of local day-care centers and school officials said health and safety considerations long ago led them to ban or restrict smoking in their facilities.

State law prohibits smoking "in areas where children are present" in child day-care centers licensed by the Virginia Social Services Department.

However, there are no such restrictions for family day-care homes, only because the regulations have not been revised recently, a department spokeswoman said.

"We plan to include something [about smoking restrictions] in the future because we know about the dangers of passive smoking," said Mary Zoller, the department's human resources program consultant.

However, Ms. Zoller said family day-care homes that participate in a voluntary registration program, which sets out newer guidelines, agree to restrict smoking around children.

There are 1,293 state-licensed

child day-care centers that have smoking restrictions imposed on them caring for about 108,000 children, said Arlene Kasper, program development supervisor for the state Social Services Department.

"Our areas are totally smoke-free. It's been that way for years," said Gypsy Holt, district program trainer for Children's World Learning Centers, which operates several day-care centers in the area. "We don't even allow parents to walk into the building with a cigarette," Ms. Holt said.

Representatives of KinderCare Learning Centers, another chain of day-care centers in the area, reiterated those concerns. "There's no smoking allowed in the center at all," said Susan Ruppold, director of the company's Brandermill center. She said the policy affected chains across the nation.

Meanwhile, area school officials say students are prohibited from smoking, and adults are confined to smoking in designated areas. Some school buildings are smoke-free, they add.

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