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Maricopa Community Colleges to ban tobacco use

Plan to urge health in Maricopa district

by **Mary Beth Faller** - Oct. 31, 2011 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

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The Maricopa Community Colleges will ban all tobacco products next year to help boost the health of students and staff and to keep campuses cleaner.

Smoking is prohibited in all buildings, but there are designated smoking areas at the colleges. As of July 1, no tobacco products will be allowed on any of the system's 10 campuses, which include [satellite](#) sites around the Valley, as well as the district's two skills centers and its office in Tempe.

"This is a bold move, but it's the right move for us," said district spokesman Tom Gariepy. Over the next several months, he said, the colleges will provide help for students, staff and faculty who want to quit smoking, including cessation classes.

Bob England, director of the Maricopa County Department of Public Health, spoke in favor of the initiative at the district's governing-board meeting last week. About one in four Arizonans ages 18 to 24 are smokers, a bit higher than the national average for that age group, he said.

The initiative, announced by Chancellor Rufus Glasper this month, was years in the making.

Michele Hamm, an exercise-science faculty member at Mesa Community College and a member of the Wellness Maricopa group that worked on the initiative, said the issue was first raised when voters passed a statewide smoking ban in 2006.

Much discussion and research followed, and the group gathered [data](#) from other colleges, including the Ozarks Technical Community College system in Missouri, one of the first in the nation to ban tobacco products, in 2003.

"One concern was whether the ban would cause an enrollment drop," Hamm said. "But there was no significant impact on enrollment."

Campus cleanliness was a big part of the push, she said.

"The facilities directors emphasized how much time their staffs spend cleaning up after tobacco users - cigarette butts that miss the ashtrays or are put out on the walls. They have to sandblast to get the ash off," she said.

Hamm said a committee will look at how other colleges handle enforcement. There are about 142,000 students and about 8,800 full- and part-time faculty and staff members districtwide.

"Some (colleges) have fines, and others have put it into the student code of conduct, where (violators) would meet with the dean," Hamm said. "Another option is to have them complete a cessation class to waive the fine.

"We're looking at some creative ways to not just say, 'You're bad, give us your money.' "

Diana Martinez is a program specialist in the Student Life and Leadership Office at Phoenix College, as well as that campus representative for IGNITE, a partnership with Tobacco Free Arizona that educates college students.

"We're very diverse in our community here, and we have a lot of international students, and smoking is part of their culture," Martinez said. "So it's great to provide them the information here."

Policy changes such as the tobacco ban are key to improving health, England said.





"Everyone knows that tobacco is a health risk. No one is unaware of that," he said. "Education can only do so much, and, frankly, we've pretty much exhausted what you can do with individual education."

"But tobacco-related policies can have an enormous impact."

England said the Smoke Free Arizona Act, which went into effect in 2007, proves that.

"The rationale for that was to protect workers from secondhand smoke, but it also demonstrated something else. The year it was implemented, the adult smoking rate in Arizona went down by 20 percent. One in five smokers quit."

"That shows that when you have policies that make smoking less convenient, that provides the incentives that many smokers need to finally kick the habit," England said.

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