

Campus smoking rules frequently ignored

University policy leaves officials without power to enforce



Smokers in HUB among those who disregard signs.

by Pat Kiernan

More than a year after the introduction of the University of Alberta's tough smoking policy, many people on campus continue to defy the rules.

Enforcement of the smoking policy is triggered by private complaints about specific violations. The vast majority of violations are never reported.

But university officials aren't sure the real solution will come from determined policing. Instead, they believe peer pressure and social acceptability ultimately determine the level to which students and staff comply.

Dr. Donald Bellow is the University's Associate Vice President of facilities. He describes the policy as regulating "not so much where you can't smoke, as where you can."

Students and staff are never likely to see a blitz against smoking policy violators. Bellow said, in drafting the policy, administration decided not to go the route of the crackdown, "which would be fraught with difficulties, but rather to use the route of peer pressure and education." He notes that the policy has been very effective in most areas of campus.

Bellow said some complaints have been resolved through improved signs or ventilation. Smoking areas that are clearly identified are more likely to receive compliance from students and staff.

Bellow said the general philosophy on enforcement of the policy is that "education, peer pressure and intelligence will, in time, produce

the desired effect on campus." The effect he refers to is for non-smokers to be free of the annoyance and health risks caused by smokers.

Unless otherwise posted, the University is a non-smoking area. Designated smoking zones are clearly marked by a sign showing a cigarette in a green circle. The current policy has been in effect since September 1, 1988.

Occasionally, smokers become puzzled by the presence of ashtrays in non-smoking areas. Attempts have been made to remove those, but some remain. One university official said he's not surprised to see people lighting up in such confusing situations.

The primary enforcement of the University's smoking policy comes through Campus Security. Operations Manager Ralph Oliver said complaints are handled by his staff.

"We will then talk to the complainant, and get more information. And we'll try to identify the offender," said Oliver.

But there are no sanctions Campus Security officers can take against the culprit. Oliver says enforcement is "by peer pressure, to convince that person to smoke where it's not offending other people. That's the only thing we can do." The smoking policy offers no provision for fines or other disciplinary measures.

Most action taken by Campus Security is in response to specific complaints. "We don't go around looking for offenders. But I'm sure that if we saw one, and it was quite an obvious thing, we might talk to them," said Oliver.

City of Edmonton officials say their jurisdiction over campus is limited by provincial legislation. Edmonton has a no-smoking bylaw enforceable with stiff fines, but prosecution has never taken place as a result of a University based complaint.

Bylaw Enforcement officers have spoken to university officials in response to specific complaints. In every case, they have always been met with a cooperative attitude. If that were to change in the future, they might attempt to prosecute, ultimately testing their jurisdiction through the courts.

There is a balance to be struck in dealing with smokers and non-smokers. The University has chosen not to ban smoking entirely, as some businesses, and many hospitals have done.

Bellow notes that smokers will continue with their habit "regardless of what we do. We should provide some area in which - if they do wish to smoke - they can do it in such a way that they don't offend the majority who do not smoke."

The effectiveness of the smoking policy is under constant scrutiny. A team of air quality consultants is currently working with the University. And the item continually appears on the agenda of the Occupational Health and Policy Committee.

"I think that in the near term, if we think a different approach needs to be taken, we will certainly investigate and consider that," said Bellow. But he points out "in most cases we feel the present policy is working reasonably well."

Incredible edibles

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been selling for a reported 70 thousand dollars. But when McLean defaulted on his August rent, he forfeited his opportunity to make a deal with an incoming business.

"Legally, I have nothing," said McLean. But if the University would reinstate the lease long enough for him to sell it, he says he would be

able to pay his creditors - including the back rent to HUB.

University officials are reluctant to comment on a case that is before the courts. McLean reports, however, that administration have not reacted positively to his request.

The space occupied by Incredible Edibles likely won't be filled by another food vendor. HUB administrators say that the mall has enough food outlets already, so the location will likely be leased to a retail tenant.

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