

## **Smoked out of public places**

**Failure of ban disappoints some with medical conditions**

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Jul 22, 2007 — Michelle Rehmeyer felt bad about having to duck out of a restaurant where she, her husband and another couple had reservations. But not bad enough to put her life on the line.

Rehmeyer, of York Township, said it happened about six months ago. The four of them had plans to have dinner in downtown York, then see a show at the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts Center.

As soon as she walked in the restaurant, however, Rehmeyer felt the tightness in her throat and chest that signaled another asthma attack. Gagging and coughing, she stumbled outside to draw on her inhaler so she could breathe again.

The others had to explain to restaurant management that reservations or not, Rehmeyer simply couldn't re-enter the restaurant.

A number of things can trigger Rehmeyer's acute asthma: perfume, scented candles. But worst of all, by far, is cigarette smoke. The restaurant they entered had a bar, with people puffing away over their drinks. Despite the non-smoking section and ventilation system in the restaurant, it was enough to trigger Rehmeyer's acute asthma attack.

That's why Rehmeyer was disappointed when a proposed statewide smoking ban that had passed in the state House of Representatives failed in the state Senate last week.

She said she'd like the opportunity to enter any restaurant she chooses without the fear of getting ambushed by cigarette smoke.

"It's one of the worst things to be allergic to," she said. "It's everywhere. And you never know when you're going to run into it."

According to Dr. Michelle M. Klinek of Family Center for Allergy and Asthma in York Township, Rehmeyer's is not an isolated case. Several conditions cause an acute sensitivity to cigarette smoke, including asthma, allergies and "chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder," which includes emphysema and bronchitis.

Klinek said that she's had patients who were rushed to the emergency room after being exposed to cigarette smoke in public settings such as restaurants.

"We're talking about a large group of people who can be affected by irritants like tobacco smoke," Klinek said.

When the state Legislature was considering the smoking ban, a number of groups opposed it - particularly tavern owners, who contended it would hurt their business. Especially objectionable for

tavern owners were proposed exemptions to the ban for private clubs, which they claim would put taverns at a competitive disadvantage.

Deb Brown, vice president of community outreach and advocacy for the American Lung Association of Pennsylvania, said that her organization had been pushing for a smoking ban. She was disappointed with the defeat but hopes the Legislature will eventually enact it after a bipartisan conference committee reconsiders it in the fall.

Brown said that her organization supports the ban for a number of reasons. But one basis on which the American Lung Association opposes smoking in public buildings comes down to access. To allow smoking is, in effect, to deny access to public buildings for people who have certain medical conditions. And in that respect, it's comparable to restaurants or taverns refusing to make their establishments accessible to wheelchairs, Brown said.

“We create two classes of people - those we protect, and those we don't,” she said. “Everyone should be protected.”

Pam Peck of Hanover also has a condition that makes her susceptible to cigarette smoke. She suffers from pulmonary arterial hypertension, which is high blood pressure in the pulmonary artery that gives her chronic shortness of breath.

Peck said that her inability to tolerate indoor cigarette smoke has prevented her from participating in get-togethers with family and friends in taverns and restaurants. Once, she even had to leave a self-service laundry and ask her mother to finish her laundry, because a woman was chain-smoking inside.

“It doesn't seem fair,” she said. “I shouldn't have to give up my right to go to a public place just like anybody else because I have a lung condition.”

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