

Benefits of Tobacco- & Vape-Free Parks & Outdoor Recreation Facilities



Capital District
Tobacco-Free
Communities

- **Tobacco- and vape-free parks enhance visitors' enjoyment of clean air, natural beauty and healthy activities.**
- **Tobacco- and vape-free policies protect all park visitors from the harmful effects of exposure to secondhand smoke and aerosol emissions from electronic devices.** Secondhand tobacco smoke is a human carcinogen for which there is no safe level of exposure. Even in outdoor settings, secondhand smoke levels can reach levels as high as those found in indoor facilities where smoking is permitted. Secondhand marijuana smoke also contains hazardous fine particulates and hundreds of chemicals similar to secondhand tobacco smoke. Exposure to secondhand smoke is especially harmful to children and adults with asthma or other chronic conditions.

The aerosol emitted by electronic smoking products frequently contains a variety of human carcinogens such as formaldehyde and benzene, and has been deemed harmful by the U.S. Surgeon General. And while the chemical makeup of aerosol emissions from vaping cannabis is less well-known, many of the same harmful by-products of vaping liquid nicotine are present in the aerosols emitted by vaping cannabis.

- **Tobacco- and vape-free policies reduce litter.** Discarded cigarette butts, vape cartridges and disposable e-cig batteries pollute the land and water and are highly toxic and dangerous to children, domestic animals, and wildlife. Small children are at risk of swallowing, choking or burning themselves with discarded butts and suffering nicotine poisoning. Vape cartridges that hold flavored nicotine or cannabis solution contain toxic chemicals that are considered hazardous waste. The lithium ion batteries the vaping devices contain pose a serious risk of fire if not disposed of properly, i.e., fully discharging and cooling, then submerging them in cold saltwater for two weeks.
- **Tobacco- and vape-free policies communicate a positive message to the community that tobacco use is not compatible with an active, healthy lifestyle.**
- **Tobacco- and vape-free park policies enjoy overwhelming support of Capital District residents.** The most recent data from a Community Survey conducted by Siena Research Institute in 2020 found that two out of every three Capital Region residents favors tobacco and vape-free recreation areas.
- **Policies provide consistency among community athletic facilities and groups.** Most community sporting events are held at either municipal or school district athletic facilities, and all school districts prohibit tobacco and electronic product use on their entire grounds. Also, many community athletic associations have tobacco-free policies and would benefit from a tobacco-free policy at the public facilities they use.
- **Tobacco-free policies help promote the message that tobacco use and sports just don't mix.** The tobacco-free sports movement is growing among professional athletes and for good reason—tobacco use impairs physical health and athletic performance.

Look who's tobacco-free in the Capital District!

City of Albany	Town of Niskayuna
City of Cohoes	Town of Glenville
City of Rensselaer	Town of Guilderland
City of Schenectady	Town of Rotterdam
City of Troy	Town of Sand Lake
City of Watervliet	Village of Altamont
County of Albany	Village of Green Island
Town of Bethlehem	Village of Menands
Town of Colonie	Village of Nassau
Town of East Greenbush	Village of Scotia
	Village of Voorheesville



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

About Tobacco- and Vape-Free Park Policies in NYS



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What is current New York State Law on smoking in public parks?

NYS Public Health Law Article 13-E prohibits smoking and vaping of tobacco and cannabis products between sunrise and sunset at all playgrounds in New York when one or more children under age 12 are present. The prominent posting of signage is also required by law to inform and encourage compliance by community members.

Are local governments able to enact additional policies restricting tobacco use?

NY Public Health Law explicitly provides that local communities can “adopt and enforce additional local law[s], ordinances, or regulations [relating to smoking] which comply with at least the minimum applicable standards set forth” by the state law. [N.Y. PUB. HEALTH LAW § 1399-r]

What kinds of local policies are currently in effect in the Capital Region?

Sixteen Capital Region municipalities prohibit tobacco use anywhere within their public parks; five prohibit tobacco use on or near playing fields, pools, and playgrounds. At least two local municipalities have already expanded their smoke-free and vape-free policies to include cannabis.

Several municipalities that took an incremental approach and began by prohibiting tobacco use in certain areas have since expanded their policies to prohibit tobacco use anywhere in their parks, finding that 100% tobacco-free policies are more effective at preventing secondhand smoke exposure, easier to understand, and easier to enforce.

Why tobacco-free rather than smoke-free?

Municipalities often set out not only to prevent secondhand smoke and aerosol exposure, but also to protect the natural environment, decrease exposure to toxic nicotine and cannabis litter, promote a positive health message, and contribute to a tobacco-free community norm. Policies that prohibit all tobacco use, including electronic products, are most effective at achieving these combined goals.

Why include e-cigarettes?

While electronic smoking devices are arguably less dangerous than traditional tobacco products, they are by no means “safe” for either users or those exposed to the secondhand aerosol emissions that they produce. Aerosol emissions from vaping liquid nicotine and cannabis have been shown to include hazardous fine particulate matter and dangerous chemicals.

How do other New York State communities enforce their policies?

The communities that passed an ordinance to establish tobacco-free parks also imposed monetary fines for violations. Even so, communities mostly rely upon voluntary compliance for their policy enforcement and encourage self-enforcement by widely publicizing the policy, and posting prominent signage with positive messaging. The majority of Capital District communities with policies have utilized free signage available from Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities.

Are existing policies working?

Across the state and in the Capital District, municipalities that have adopted policies report high satisfaction with their policies and positive public response.

Will policies keep some people from using public park and recreation areas?

Actually, *not* having a policy is more likely to decrease people’s use of these shared public spaces. The most recent data from Community Surveys conducted by Siena Research Institute in 2020 found support for tobacco-free recreation areas among two out of every three Capital District residents. The community norm for shared public spaces is becoming a tobacco- and vape-free norm.

How many municipalities in New York have adopted tobacco-free outdoor area policies?

To date, more than 500 New York municipalities have adopted tobacco-free outdoor area policies (21 in the Capital District) and the list is growing.