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Georgia Colleges Prohibiting Tobacco, but Questions About Enforcement Linger

By ALAN BLINDER
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ATHENS, Ga. — Amid carefree talk of starting lineups, one public notice to the Sanford Stadium crowd on a recent Saturday stood out: Beginning Oct. 1, the University of Georgia will be among the academic institutions in this state that prohibit tobacco products from its campuses.

At the 31 public [colleges and universities](#) that make up the University System of Georgia, [smoking will be forbidden](#). The use of chewing tobacco could lead to a penalty. And even products that “simulate the use of tobacco,” including e-cigarettes, are scheduled for banishment.

But of all the questions that complement the new regulations, the one that seems to loom largest here centers on the extent to which the University of Georgia should enforce the ban. Officials in Atlanta talk of a vigorous campaign to eliminate tobacco from campuses that thousands of people visit each day, but students openly doubt that administrators will impose sanctions on violators, and many predict the ban will be ignored and defied.

“Hypothetically, yes, it’d be nice to have a tobacco-free world,” said Beni Kozen, a junior, who nursed a cigarette before a physics test on a recent afternoon. “But sometimes you just need a study break and a stress-relief break.” The restrictions will take effect as a rising number of colleges across the country rush to lay down new limits on [tobacco use](#). In October 2010, according to the lobbying group [Americans for Nonsmokers’ Rights](#), fewer than 450 colleges had enacted smoking bans. By Wednesday, that number will

have increased to nearly 1,500, with most of those schools having prohibited all forms of tobacco.

Some campuses in Georgia had restrictive tobacco rules in place before the Board of Regents decided this year to take action at all of the state's public colleges and universities, which enrolled more than 294,000 students last spring.

“It goes back to health and productivity,” said Marion Fedrick, the university system's vice chancellor of human resources. “We're not at all saying that they can't smoke. They just can't smoke on our campuses.”

The regents empowered university presidents to design their own plans for the restrictions, which are administrative in nature, meaning students who violate them are not subject to criminal prosecution.

Although the presidents have leeway, Ms. Fedrick said the regents “are 100 percent expecting this to be implemented,” and state officials plan audits to evaluate compliance.

At the University of Georgia, where a narrower policy has long included prohibitions on smoking within 35 feet of building entrances and campus bus stops, officials are advertising the planned restrictions with signs that sometimes feature a picture of Uga IX, the English bulldog that is the university's mascot.

“We're taking the approach of a positive educational campaign, not an enforcement campaign,” said Thomas H. Jackson Jr., a university spokesman. “We're not even using the word ‘ban.’ It's ‘prohibited.’ It's not going to be a gotcha campaign.”

There is no definitive playbook, experts said, for how forcefully to apply tobacco restrictions once they are enacted. But many colleges begin with lax enforcement regimes.

“We really encourage campuses to have that phase-in process and have a lot of education,” said Tad Spencer, the director of tobacco prevention initiatives for Naspa, a national student affairs organization. “It’s not just an immediate jump-in.”

Many colleges, Mr. Spencer said, have spent up to a year prodding students toward compliance before they begin aggressively enforcing the rules against tobacco use on campus.

By that time, many students have accepted the new standards. At Framingham State University in Massachusetts, which banned tobacco last year, the dean of students said she had received no complaints this semester from students about the regulations.

“People who have been here all along are adapting to a change, and secondly, the people choosing to come here know the policy,” said the dean, Melinda K. Stoops, whose university west of Boston had about 6,400 students last fall.

But she conceded that challenges remain.

“Is our campus 100 percent smoke-free? No. You’ll still find someone violating the policy,” she said. “Is it dramatically different? Yes.”

At Georgia, there is also no unanimity about how the university should proceed or whether the ban should have ever been enacted.

Some students contend that the effects of smoking in public merit sweeping action.

“No one wants to be walking behind someone and have to breathe in their secondhand smoke,” said Alexa Karen, a pre-veterinary student who is from Marlboro, N.J.

But Ms. Karen and two of her friends, asked whether they thought the ban would make a difference, had a simple, simultaneous reply: “No.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/29/us/georgia-colleges-prohibiting-tobacco-but-questions-about-enforcement-linger.html?smid=nytcore-ipad-share&smprod=nytcore-ipad>