

Smoke-Free Beaches in Ontario: Progress and Implications for Practice

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Introduction:

As smoke-free outdoor spaces are becoming more common, smoking restrictions are extending to a variety of outdoor settings, including beaches. Beaches offer both residents and visitors opportunities for recreation and relaxation. For many, the experience of visiting a beach may be enhanced if the environment were to be designated as “smoke-free”. Smoke-free beaches can prevent litter and pollution caused by discarded cigarette butts, offer protection from exposure to second-hand smoke, and may help to socially de-normalize the behaviour which may prevent children and youth from starting to smoke. Several municipalities in Ontario have implemented an outdoor smoke-free spaces bylaw that includes beaches, or are in the process of doing so. The experiences of these municipalities as well as evidence from other jurisdictions in Canada and internationally, can guide policy-makers and public health practitioners in the development, implementation, and enforcement of smoke-free beaches.



Overview:

Why Implement Smoke-Free beaches.....	p.2
Implementing Smoke-Free Beaches and Jurisdictional Issues.....	p.3
Smoke-Free Beaches in Ontario.....	p.3
Experiences of Jurisdictions Outside of Ontario.....	p.6
Implications for Practice in Ontario.....	p.9
Conclusions.....	p.10

Why Implement Smoke-Free Beaches?

There are several benefits to extending outdoor smoke-free legislation to include beaches, such as decreased environmental threats (fire risk, litter and pollution) and second-hand smoke exposure, as well as providing positive role modelling for children and youth.

Reduce Environmental Threats:

Smoking in outdoor areas can contribute to increased litter and pollution caused by improperly discarded cigarette butts, especially in parks and beaches¹. Cigarette butts are the most common form of litter in the world, with an estimated 4.5 trillion butts discarded each year worldwide². The Great Canadian Shore Cleanup, which is part of the International Coastal Cleanup, organizes annual shoreline cleanups of local waterways across the country. According to 2010 data, smoking related activities (cigarettes and cigarette filters, cigarette packaging, plastic cigar tips, matches and lighters) accounted for 37.8% of all litter collected, and cigarettes and cigarette filters were the number one recovered litter item³. Besides being a public nuisance, littered cigarette butts also pose a threat to the environment. Cigarette filters are made from cellulose acetate, a form of plastic which is not biodegradable⁴. Cigarette butts are also toxic and can cause adverse health effects in marine wildlife⁵ and small children if ingested⁶.

Protect from Second-hand Smoke Exposure:

Smoke-free beaches, along with most smoke-free outdoor spaces legislation, can offer decreased exposure to second-hand smoke. Both the US Surgeon General⁷ and the World Health Organization⁸ have declared that there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke. Second-hand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals and compounds, hundreds of which are toxic and at least 50 are known to cause cancer⁹. Despite common perceptions that tobacco smoke simply dissipates outdoors, research has demonstrated that levels of second-hand smoke in outdoor settings can be comparable to indoor levels¹⁰. Furthermore, a recent review of existing evidence concluded that even brief exposures to tobacco smoke may cause significant adverse health effects in non-smokers¹¹.

De-normalize Smoking Behaviour:

Youth exposed to tobacco smoke are at a greater risk for starting to smoke compared to adults¹². Based on the social cognitive theory and social ecological theory of behaviour, an individual's behaviour can be directly influenced by social modelling¹³. Evidence suggests that youth who have friends and family members who smoke are more likely to be smokers themselves¹⁴.



Smoking restrictions reduce the visibility of smoking, which can

impact youth perceptions about smoking by creating the message that smoking is unacceptable¹⁵. Reduced visibility of smoking also supports smokers who are trying to quit by reducing cues for smoking¹⁶. Therefore, it is important to consider smoke-free legislation in settings where youth are more likely to frequent, such as parks and beaches.

Implementing Smoke-Free Beaches and Jurisdictional Issues

Municipalities in Ontario (and elsewhere in the country) have the ability to enact a smoke-free beaches by-law under their existing jurisdiction unless there is an intervening factor, mainly that of federal jurisdiction. This would only apply in certain locations such as federal ports or on federally controlled waterways, Department of National Defence lands, or First Nations reserves as established under the Indian Act (1876)¹⁷. An area municipality then would only have challenges enacting a smoke-free law if one of these other jurisdictions had a law explicitly permitting smoking¹⁸.

Smoke-Free Beaches in Ontario

The *Smoke-Free Ontario Act* (SFOA), which came into force May 31st, 2006, bans smoking in all indoor workplaces and public places¹⁹.

However, several municipalities have enacted municipal bylaws that extend beyond the SFOA to regulate a variety of outdoor settings^{20,21}. There are currently six municipalities in Ontario that include smoke-free beaches as part of their outdoor smoke-free legislation (see **Table 1**). Telephone interviews were conducted with public health department staff in a sample of those municipalities, namely Thunder



Bay, Timmins and Peterborough, to elicit details about their smoke-free beaches legislation, and these are also presented in Table 1 and starred with an asterisk.

Table 1: Ontario Municipalities with by-laws restricting or banning smoking on public beaches**Arnprior****Public Health Unit:** Renfrew County and District Health Unit

Bylaw# 5739-09

Date in force: June 30, 2009**Policy details:** Smoking prohibited on any public land which is identified as a public playground or public beach within the limits of the Town of Arnprior.**How the bylaw was promoted:** A notice was placed on the town's website and in local newspapers to alert residents of the new bylaw before it came into force.**Enforcement strategy:** 'No-smoking' signs posted at beach locations; bylaw enforcement officers have the authority to fine offenders for up to \$195.00.**Orillia****Public Health Unit:** Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Chapter 953

Date in force: June 30, 2008**Policy details:** Smoking prohibited within 10m of a playground area, sport activity area (including but not limited to ball diamonds, soccer fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, etc) or beach area. A beach area is defined as "the sand area of beaches located in conjunction with a municipally designed public swim area." The bylaw applies to two beaches, both located in the City parks.***Peterborough****Public Health Unit:** Peterborough County-City Health Unit

Bylaw# 10-123

Date in force: July 1, 2010**Policy details:** Smoking prohibited within 9m of any public playground, beach, wading pool or splash pad.**How support was garnered:** The Peterborough City-County Health Unit conducted an opinion poll to assess level of citizen support for extending the bylaw to other outdoor settings, including beaches²². The poll results indicated a high level of public support for smoke-free beaches.**How the bylaw was promoted:** While an outdoor smoke-free spaces bylaw that did not include beaches was initially approved in 2009, the City's plan is to use a phased-in approach that designates a new outdoor setting as "smoke-free" each year in an attempt to phase out smoking in all municipal parks and beaches²³. A benefit of using the phased-in approach is that as each additional space becomes regulated, it provides an additional opportunity to promote existing restrictions and create community awareness²⁴.**Smith-Ennismore-Lakefield****Public Health Unit:** Peterborough County-City Health Unit

Bylaw# 2009-099

Date in force: November 24, 2009**Policy details:** Smoking prohibited within 9m of select outdoor bleachers and players' benches, of select playground equipment zones, and of select gazebos, beaches, and shade shelters.***Thunder Bay****Public Health Unit:** Thunder Bay District Health Unit

Bylaw# 052-2010

Date in force: June 1, 2010**Policy details:** Smoking or using tobacco products (including snus, chewing or spit tobacco) prohibited in unenclosed workplaces including booths or stands where food and drinks are sold or consumed, within 3m of a refreshment vehicle located in a public place, within 3m of the entrance to a workplace, within 10m of the entrance to a recreational facility, within 10m of any playground equipment located on land owned by the Corporation, within 10m from the edge of a beach (water's edge). The policy includes Boulevard Lake and Chippewa beaches.**How support was garnered:** A working group began planning in 2008, which consisted of public health unit staff, community partners, city bylaw representation, and local youth²⁵. Youth employed by the Thunder Bay District

Health Unit led an advocacy campaign in the community including displays, presentations, events, and postcard signing to track community member support²⁶. The working group also launched a social marketing campaign to create awareness of the issue that included billboards, bus signs, postcards, posters, and car magnets. Support was also garnered from local sport organizations, community health organizations, community youth groups, and city counselors. Local media outlets were also used to gain support and create awareness. Press conferences were held and media pick-up occurred at community events.

Enforcement Strategy: The City of Thunder bay has a municipal bylaw officer designated to enforce the bylaw and to follow-up on complaints; enforcement capacity is a challenge. However, with appropriate signage and the community support gathered from the marketing campaign and other community promotion efforts, the bylaw is largely self-enforced²⁷.

*Timmins

Public Health Unit: Porcupine Health Unit

Bylaw# 2009-6844

Date in force: November 16, 2009

Policy details: Smoking prohibited within 10m of playground equipment within parks and playgrounds and within 10 meters of any recreational field. Smoking only permitted at designated areas at beach locations. The bylaw regulates smoking at both Gilles Lake and White Waterfront beaches.

How support was garnered: Whisper Out Loud, a Ministry of Health Promotion & Sport funded Youth Action Alliance (YAA) worked with the Porcupine Health Unit to develop and present a bylaw to regulate smoke-free spaces at public parks and beaches to the Timmins City Council²⁸. The peer leaders of the YAA began to garner support for the bylaw by conducting a survey of Timmins residents where it was found that 65.9% supported restrictions at parks and beaches and 70.9% agreed that children are more likely to use tobacco when they see their role model doing so in public parks and beaches²⁹. Letters of support were also obtained from the Canadian Cancer Society, Timmins Get Clean, and the Cochrane District Heart Health Network³⁰.

How the bylaw was promoted: Once adopted, the Porcupine Health Unit partnered with a major local sporting organization, Timmins Porcupine Minor Soccer Inc. (TPMSI) to promote the Smoke-Free Parks and Beaches bylaw, in combination with broader Tobacco-Free Sports and Recreation messages. Promotion of the bylaw also occurred through earned media including television interviews and newsprint articles.

Enforcement strategy: In the City of Timmins, a municipal bylaw officer or police officer is designated to enforce the Smoke-Free Parks and Beaches bylaw on a follow-up to complaint basis, however through bylaw promotion and awareness it is generally self-enforcing³¹.

Adapted from Play, Live, Be Tobacco Free, 2011; Beck, 2011.

*Telephone interviews were conducted with public health staff at these health units

Other municipalities in Ontario have announced their intention to implement smoke-free beaches in the near future. For example, in March 2011, the City of Hamilton approved a smoke-free outdoor recreation areas bylaw that will take effect May 2012³². The bylaw will prohibit smoking in parks, playgrounds, beaches and recreational fields. Also, Lambton County Community Health Services Department, which serves 11 municipalities, has been advocating for a smoke-free outdoor spaces bylaw in the City of Sarnia and surrounding area. The City of Sarnia has already posted “please don’t smoke” signs at parks and beaches and will use these signs to help promote public support³³. The County of Lambton has also taken steps to move forward with a county-level policy by presenting a council report in June, 2011³⁴.

Experiences of Jurisdictions Outside of Ontario:

Vancouver

In April 2010, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation approved a smoking ban in the city's parks and beaches that came into effect September 1, 2010. The *Smoking Regulation Bylaw* prohibits smoking on 18km of the city's beaches. Efforts to pass the legislation began in September 2009, when Vancouver Park Board staff administered an online survey to the public that asked their opinion on establishing "no-smoking" areas at beaches as well as playgrounds, playing fields, trails and other park spaces³⁵. Through collecting public feedback, the Park Board found that 75% of those surveyed favoured establishing beaches as "no-smoking" areas³⁶. As part of the implementation plan, an education and awareness campaign began immediately after the policy was approved in April 2010 and continued



Source: http://vancouver.ca/parks/news/2010/100901_smokefree.htm

throughout the summer. This education phase consisted of temporary signage at key beach and park locations, website information, ads through park partners and businesses at community centres and other Park Board facilities (e.g. restaurants, gift shops, concessions, etc.) and media outreach³⁷. Park Rangers lifeguards, and other staff advised visitors about the changes prior to September, and permanent signage was installed when the ban took effect

September 1, 2010. Costs associated with promoting the policy are minimal as a result of key partnerships and support from the local health department (Vancouver Coastal Health), the local fire department (Vancouver Fire and Rescue), the Clean Air Coalition of B.C. and the Canadian Cancer Society³⁸.

The Park Board's primary plan for enforcement is voluntary compliance with the smoke-free bylaw through education. However, Park Rangers, City of Vancouver bylaw enforcement officers and Health Inspectors have the power to issue tickets to those who are noncompliant at a minimum fine of \$250. Based on media reports, the bylaw appears to have been implemented successfully with good compliance. In the nine months since the policy took effect, park rangers have issued only five tickets, all of which were given to smokers who had been told more than once to butt out³⁹. Other municipalities within the province that have smoke-free beach policies include the District of North Vancouver, Port Moody, Sicamous, Squamish, West Vancouver, and White Rock⁴⁰.

California

There are 123 local municipalities in the United States with 100% smoke-free beach ordinances, excluding beaches with designated smoking areas, as of October 2011⁴¹. The majority of these municipalities are in the state of California, which has one of the oldest and most comprehensive tobacco control programs in North America. In

November of 2003, Solana Beach, California became the first municipality in the United States to pass a smoke-free beach policy⁴². The San Dieguito Alliance for Drug Free Youth, comprised of mostly high school students, worked with the Tobacco-free Communities Coalition of San Diego County and the American Lung Association to earn the support of their community and City Council⁴³. They made presentations to City Council members, collected and counted cigarette butts, and conducted a public opinion survey of beach-goers⁴⁴. After a year of planning and campaign efforts, City Council voted unanimously in favour of passing *Solana Beach Ordinance #316* making the beaches in the city smoke-free⁴⁵.

Smoke-free beaches have since become the standard in Southern California Communities, where more than 100 miles of shoreline prohibit smoking (**Figure 1**)⁴⁶. This includes Los Angeles County in southern California, where 100% of the coast line is completely smoke-free⁴⁷. Included along this coast line are the famous Huntington Beach, Laguna Beach, Long Beach, Newport Beach, and Santa Monica communities, among many others⁴⁸. Recently, California legislators have taken steps to implement a state-wide smoke-free outdoor spaces policy. In 2009, a bill was introduced by the State Senate that prohibited smoking in state parks⁴⁹. However, the bill was vetoed by the governor in 2010. It is likely that this bill will be re-introduced given the support the bill has generated from state and local leaders⁵⁰. Currently, Maine is the only U.S. state to implement a state-wide outdoor smoke-free spaces policy that includes beaches⁵¹.



Figure 1: Southern California communities with smoke-free beaches (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2007)

Source: http://www.lapublichealth.org/tob/pdf/Beach_Nov_25_08revised.pdf

New York City

In February 2011, Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed a bill that prohibits smoking within New York City's parks, beaches, and pedestrian plazas. The bill came into effect May 23, 2011 and covers 14 miles of beach in the city⁵². Bloomberg's argument for the bill was based on the fact that New Yorkers are exposed to second-hand smoke at higher rates than the national average; 57% of New Yorkers who do not smoke have elevated levels of cotinine in their blood, a residue left by exposure to second-hand smoke, compared to 45% of non-smokers nationally⁵³. In 2009, the New York City Coalition for a Smoke-Free City commissioned a survey of New York City residents that showed 65% supported a smoking ban in parks and beaches.

The new law is anticipated to be self-enforced with an expectation that New Yorkers will ask each other to follow the law and stop smoking. Those that violate the new law could receive a \$50 ticket by a Park Enforcement Officer⁵⁴. New York City officials planned that officers would focus on delivering warnings during the first summer of the ban. Reports estimate that more than 700 people were



approached by police officers for smoking in areas prohibited by the law in the first few months of the policy⁵⁵. Only 3 citations had been issued for violating the ban, as of September 2011⁵⁶. The city will continue to educate New Yorkers through signage posted at parks and beaches in the hopes that compliance will improve over time as the public becomes increasingly aware of the policy⁵⁷.

Australia

In May 2004, Sydney's Manly Council became the first in Australia, and only the second in the world to legislate a smoking ban on a public beach⁵⁸. The primary reasons for the ban were to reduce cigarette butt litter and to stop the damage to the marine environment caused by cigarettes⁵⁹. In the state of New South Wales, 5 city councils have smoke-free beaches, including the famous Bondi and Manly beaches in Sydney⁶⁰. In 2005, the Queensland government implemented the first state-wide restriction on smoking in outdoor areas⁶¹. The ban prohibits smoking on sections of beaches that are patrolled and marked with flags for safe swimming, and on artificial beaches. The legislation also prohibits smoking at major sports facilities, within 10 meters of outdoor children's playground equipment and within 4 meters of non-residential building entrances, including offices, banks, restaurants, snack bars and cinemas⁶². Smoking is also prohibited on all beaches in the state of Western Australia⁶³.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong introduced its outdoor smoking restrictions in 2007, which ban smoking at public bathing beaches as well as a variety of other outdoor settings including the open areas of hospitals; open areas of all schools, including university campuses; public swimming pools; the Hong Kong Stadium; Hong Kong Wetland Park and Mongkok Stadium; and at public transit interchanges⁶⁴. Evaluations by Wilson, Thompson & Edwards have determined that the ban has been successful based on cigarette butt audits and inspections⁶⁵. The researchers also reported that there was noticeable signage at the park and beach entrances (**Figure 2**)⁶⁶.



Figure 2: Signage at a smoke-free beach in Hong Kong in May 2007 (Wilson et al, 2007)

Source: <http://journal.nzma.org.nz/journal/120-1257/2624/content.pdf>

Implications for Practice in Ontario

Local experiences of implementing smoke-free beaches legislation in Ontario, as well as experiences from other jurisdictions in Canada and internationally, can inform those working to implement new smoke-free beaches in Ontario. Besides the prevention of litter and pollution caused by improperly discarded cigarette butts, protection from exposure to secondhand smoke, as well as positive role modelling and socially denormalizing smoking behaviour, smoke-free beaches can also promote tourism and thus support local economy.

Blue Flag Beaches

Health officials suggest that implementing smoke-free beaches may assist municipalities to obtain a Blue Flag beach status, a well-respected international beach designation awarded to beaches and marinas that meet criteria for water quality,



Source: Robert F. 2007

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Blauue_Flagge_2007.jpg

environmental management and safety⁶⁷. Sixteen beaches in Ontario have a Blue Flag designation, including eight beaches in Toronto, Grand Bend Beach, Sauble Beach, Port Stanley Main Beach and Wasaga Beach Provincial Park⁶⁸. Going smoke-free may help other beaches meet the “Blue Flag” criteria, by improving environmental management and cleanliness. This incentive may motivate many beaches to go smoke-free, especially those that rely heavily on tourism, as getting a Blue Flag Beach designation may help to bring in more visitors.

Planning for Policy Implementation

Smoke-free beaches are typically a component of a larger policy regulating smoking in several outdoor areas. The experiences of several municipalities indicate that planning for such a policy commences at least a year prior to implementation. During this stage, gathering local level data, through opinion polls and other means to demonstrate the level of public support for smoke-free environments, including beaches, can be useful. Partnering with local agencies and organizations can also help at this stage, especially if their support may offset some of the costs associated with implementing the policy. Partnering with environmental groups concerned with water quality or wildlife may be appropriate. Informing the public of the policy before it is implemented to increase awareness has also proven to be a successful strategy, such as posting signs at beach areas or through media campaigns. Finally, having an enforcement plan is essential when implementing a smoke-free outdoor spaces policy. If the policy is intended to be self-enforced, experience shows that signage is key to raising awareness and increasing self-regulating behaviours.

Conclusions:

As the trend toward outdoor smoke-free spaces increases both locally and worldwide, it is likely that an increasing number of beaches will go smoke-free as well as a variety of other outdoor settings. Evidence from jurisdictions that have had success with these policies can guide decision-makers and public health practitioners working to create smoke-free beach environments. Further evaluation and continued monitoring of local municipalities that have implemented smoke-free beaches legislation in Ontario may be useful for moving forward. Pre-post studies of smoking rates, public attitudes, and behaviour before and after the ban, as well as documentation of enforcement experiences may be beneficial to inform other jurisdictions considering the same regulations.

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