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Palomar considers new smoking limits

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SAN MARCOS – Smokers may soon have fewer areas to light up at Palomar College in San Marcos.

Officials are considering revising the community college's smoking policy so that smokers would be able to puff only in designated areas. It might mean, for example, that smokers would have to stay away from the clock tower, a popular spot on campus for a cigarette break.

Overview

Background: Some students have been pushing for tighter smoking restrictions at Palomar College in San Marcos.

What's changing: Under a proposed revision of the community college's smoking policy, faculty members, other employees and students would be allowed to light up only in designated areas.

The future: Palomar College district trustees will consider approving the policy change at their meeting at 5 p.m. Tuesday on campus, 1140 W. Mission Road.

Palomar's board of trustees will vote on the new policy Tuesday evening.

If approved, the change would immediately replace Palomar's current policy, which bans smoking within 20 feet of buildings. The San Marcos campus already has three areas where smoking is banned: around the student union complex, the health services center and the athletics building. Smoking is not allowed inside buildings.

Former and current leaders of Palomar's Associated Student Government

have been pushing for about two years for tighter smoking restrictions on campus. Students have mainly cited health concerns.

The student body also worked with Palomar's director of health services and the Vista Community Clinic to press for tighter restrictions.

 Jesse Lyn, the immediate past president of the student body, said that some students support a total smoking ban but that the proposed policy change would be a good first step.

Nonsmokers shouldn't be exposed to secondhand smoke and its health effects, Lyn said, and discarded cigarette butts are also a problem.

Other community colleges in the county have become smoke-free campuses, such as San Diego Mesa College, or have adopted more restrictions on smoking on campus in recent years. In East County, Grossmont and Cuyamaca colleges, which already have designated smoking areas on campus, will go smoke-free in 2009.

If the policy is approved, there would be six smoking areas on campus for the 2008-09 school year, said Sherry Titus, the interim director of student affairs. But the locations could change in the future, because Palomar College is undergoing reconstruction and renovation work.

The six proposed sites are: benches by the Howard Brubeck Theatre; a grassy area near the student services building; a road in front of the library; parking lot 11; vending machines by the GJ building on the north end of campus; and benches in front of the trade and industry building.

Titus said the sites were identified by the Facilities Review Committee, which also would decide on the types of signs to post.

Enforcement isn't a key point of the proposed policy, Titus said. Campus police won't ticket people smoking outside the designated areas, she said.

"They will be encouraged to move to the designated areas," she said.

Titus said the goal is to get smokers to police themselves so that they will adjust to smoking only in the allowed areas.

Faculty and other staff members won't face any penalties, Titus said. But students who persist in smoking outside the designated areas could face code-of-conduct punishment, such as community service, she said.

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