

Grossmont, Cuyamaca colleges to ban smoking on campus

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Grossmont and Cuyamaca colleges will ban smoking on campus beginning next year, joining other local jurisdictions that have adopted similar policies in recent years.

"It's in the best interest of everybody from a health perspective to remove smoking from the campuses," said Bill Garrett, president of the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District governing board.

The board voted 5-0 Tuesday to continue allowing smoking in designated areas for the rest of the year, then prohibit smoking altogether as of next January.

The board also directed the district to move smoking areas farther from classroom buildings until the ban takes effect.

Grossmont College student Eric Schneider, 20, spoke in favor of the ban at the board meeting, saying he is allergic to cigarette smoke.

"It's a real smart direction to go in," Schneider said.

Mesa College in San Diego and a few other California community colleges also have banned smoking.

Grossmont-Cuyamaca is the state's only multiple-college district to institute a ban, according to Communities Against Substance Abuse, an El Cajon-based nonprofit.

The county and several cities, including San Diego and El Cajon, have varying restrictions on smoking. El Cajon, where Grossmont College is based, passed a smoking ban last year in virtually all public places.

The Grossmont-Cuyamaca district set up designated smoking areas last year at the recommendation of a task force that included students. The goal was to review that policy after one year.

Campus surveys showed students were split on whether to continue the partial ban or cut smoking altogether, district officials said.

"When there is no consensus, it's the responsibility of the board to take a leadership position and make a decision," said Garrett, the board president.

Cuyamaca College's student trustee, Audrey Causton, voted for the ban, while Grossmont College's student trustee, Crystal Bernier-Sudano, did not. Their votes are advisory.

Bernier-Sudano argued to keep designated smoking areas, but to move them to the perimeter of the campus.

"I was shocked the board did that," Bernier-Sudano said of the ban. "That's not what students want."

Students are the largest constituency.”

The smoking ban will be mostly self-enforced, officials said, though public safety officers will have authority to issue warnings or citations. Specific penalties have not yet been determined, a district spokeswoman said.

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