

Statewide cigarette vending bill dies

By Gary Dawson
Staff Writer

Legislation prohibiting local bans on cigarette vending machines but imposing milder statewide restrictions may have suffered a fatal blow Thursday in a Minnesota Senate committee.

The Senate Commerce Committee on a divided voice vote tabled the bill sponsored by Sen. James Metzger, DFL-South St. Paul. Committee Chairman Sam Solon, DFL-Duluth, declared the legislation dead for the 1990 session, saying he will not hold any additional hearings on it.

But Rep. Bob McEachern, DFL-Maple Lake, sponsor of a companion bill that has reached the House floor, said it is premature to pronounce any pending legislation dead before the Legislature adjourns sometime in April.

"We haven't gone home yet, have we?" McEachern said.

Sen. William Luther, DFL-Brooklyn Park, assistant majority leader of the Senate, made the successful motion to kill the bill after Metzger had watered down its effects on existing local ordinances.

An audience full of schoolchildren and anti-smoking activists op-

posed to the Metzger-McEachern bill broke out in applause and cheers when the vote was announced.

In an attempt to gain committee support for the bill, Metzger amended his bill to eliminate a provision that pre-empts existing local ordinances that ban use of the machines or are more restrictive than the state legislation.

Luther's move to bury the proposal came as the committee was considering another amendment that would have allowed communities to pass ordinances more restrictive than state law.

Students from Stillwater, Bloomington and Oakdale schools testified against the bill, saying the proposed restrictions wouldn't stop minors from getting cigarettes. Metzger's bill would require machine sales to be monitored by employees in liquor establishments. In other public places the machines could only be operated if employees opened an electronic locking device or provided tokens.

But Nik Blaskovich, 18, of Stillwater High School said students participating in a survey found bar employees often assisted minors in obtaining cigarettes.

"They would probably help us if there were locks on the vending machines," he said.

Students from Oakdale Elementary School presented a petition with 600 names opposing sale of cigarettes in vending machines.

"This is a major health issue," said Dr. Stuart Hanson, of the Park-Nicollet Medical Center, speaking for the Minnesota Medical Association.

Hanson said that not smoking is the No. 1 health preventive measure available and that many young people first obtain cigarettes from vending machines.

Metzger said his bill, supported by the tobacco-vending industry, would provide uniform state restrictions — restrictions that don't exist in most communities and are stronger than some local ordinances.

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Airline smoking ban excludes pilots

New York Times

LOS ANGELES — Smoke-free air in the cabin of an airliner may be better for the health of passengers, but federal officials have determined that it is safer to let the pilots keep smoking.

In an effort to avoid withdrawal symptoms that could affect the performance of cigarette-smoking pilots, a federal ban on cigarettes that took effect on all airlines last month made an exception for flight crews.

The exception, which was reported Friday in the Washington Post, was based on a 1978 study by the National Institutes of Health finding that possible withdrawal symptoms would pose a potential risk to the performance of pi-

lots, said the FAA's Dr. Andrew Horne.

"The effects of withdrawal in a habitual smoker are associated with decrements in vigilance, in concentration, and with increased irritability, anxiety and aggression," Horne quoted the report as saying.

"I just wish people were as sympathetic with airline passengers who find the flying experience a stressful one," said Dave Branton, president of a group called Smoker's Rights Alliance.

Horne voiced little sympathy.

"There's a lot of difference," he said. "A smoker in the back of the plane is not instrumental to the safety of the flight, and the pilot certainly is."

It's a different story at Egan-based Northwest Airlines where both pilots and passengers have been doing without cigarettes since 1988.

"We never got any real complaints from pilots who felt their performance was inhibited by their inability to smoke," Northwest spokesman Bob Gibbons said.

"The rule for the cockpit is the same rule that applies to the cabin," he said. On Atlantic and Pacific flights, however, the cabin is divided into smoking and non-smoking sections and smoking is allowed in the cockpit.

Staff writer Linda Owen contributed to this report.