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Police, firefighters may get no-smoking order

■ St. Paul considers banning tobacco use for all new hires

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St. Paul is considering a requirement that newly hired police officers and firefighters abstain from smoking or using tobacco products as a condition of employment.

Under the proposal, violators could be fired.

The policy — to be debated by Mayor Jim Scheibel and the City Council — would apply to officers and firefighters hired by the city beginning in 1992. It would not be imposed on smokers now working for the two departments. Minneapolis also is considering such a ban.

Smoking can be detected by various tests for nicotine and its byproducts.

The idea is being pushed as a way of reducing the city's worker's compensation costs for injured officers and firefighters. The cost is \$250,000 a year and expected to rise, said Ronald Guilfoile, St. Paul's risk manager.

Only police officers and firefighters are included, Guilfoile said, because of a state law that assumes that heart ailments, cancer and infectious diseases are job-related in the two occupations. However, he said the ban eventually could apply to all public employees.

Cities in the state are trying to change the law that covers police officer and firefighter illnesses, Guilfoile said, in addition to promoting a smoking ban.

Passive cigarette smoke kills 53,000 non-smoking Americans each year, according to American Heart Association. Page 2A



McCutcheon



Colonna

"It has been proven that things such as smoking do cause heart disease or affect the body's ability to reject infectious diseases," Guilfoile said.

"As long as the law is on the books that presumes certain things are job-related, then the employer has the right to take the necessary steps to reduce the probability of that certain injury occurring," he said. "We have to do that to protect the taxpayers."

Police Chief William McCutcheon, an ex-smoker, and Fire Chief John Colonna, a smoker, are embracing the proposal.

But the presidents of the unions representing police officers and firefighters oppose the idea.

"I have problems with it. I think it's a violation of our constitutional liberties," said Howard "Butch" Swintek, president of the 524-member St. Paul Police Federation.

"Where do we draw the line? Is the next requirement that you have to be married to come on the job, because married people are more stable than single people? Are we going to start hiring people who were born and raised from Michigan, because Michigan has lower cancer rates than Minnesota?" Swintek asked.

"I can sympathize with the city. At the same time, where does it end?" asked Gary Olding, president of the 400-member International Association of Firefighters Local 21.

But Guilfoile said courts in the nation have upheld the restriction.

He said similar or more limited policies are enforced by the states of Florida and Massachusetts and by Duluth; Phoenix, Ariz.; Janesville, Wis.; Wichita, Kan.; Shaker Heights, Ohio; Fairfax County, Va.; and Alexandria, Va.

"I'm a strong anti-smoker," McCutcheon said. "It makes sense for the city to reduce its liability."

"It's a good idea for employees, to encourage them not to smoke," Colonna said. "It's good for the city, because of liabilities it incurs for smoking-induced diseases, and it's good for the citizens, because people who don't smoke have an easier time staying in shape."

Although the policy is weeks away from being considered for adoption, the initial reception by the Scheibel administration was warm, especially if both chiefs support it. Executive Assistant Marcia Keller said.

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