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HEADLINE: THERE'S NO SMOKE, LITTLE IRE FOR SKOKIE'S POLICE RECRUITS

BODY:

Even at home in the bathroom in the middle of the night with the lights out, the drapes drawn and the water running, rookie officer John Kane of the Skokie Police Department could not light up a cigarette without putting his job on the line.

"It doesn't bother me," said Kane, 28, one of a handful of new officers covered by an unusual and controversial department regulation forbidding new recruits to smoke or chew tobacco on or off duty. "I don't smoke and haven't since the 6th grade."

"It doesn't matter to me," added Ken Borne, 24, a two-year veteran village firefighter also covered by the regulation. "I don't even really think about it."

But several angry village officials who just found out about the regulation are considerably less blasé.

"It's absolutely incredible," said Trustee Robert Fritzshall, one of several Village Board members to speak out against the total smoking ban at a recent board meeting. "It's invasive, it's intrusive and it's irresponsible. I don't think we have any right to go into a man's house and tell him he can't smoke."

Trustee Jackie Gorell called the limitation "ludicrous" and said "off-duty officers and firemen should be free to do what they want to do within the law."

"We're overstepping our authority," added Trustee William Elliot.

Fire Chief Thomas Quillin, who introduced the idea to Skokie, said the 24-hour smoking ban has caused no protests or disciplinary problems within his department, where 25 new employees have signed a pledge of abstinence since mid-1985.

"It's both for the health of our employees and a protection for our pension system," said Quillin. By law, heart and lung disabilities are considered job-related for firefighters.

"The productivity of officers increases dramatically if they don't smoke," said Police Chief William Miller, who instituted the no-tobacco pledge in his bailiwick earlier this year, partly in an effort to cut down on heart disease, also considered a job-related disability for policemen. "Look at the relationship between tobacco and sickness. Smoking by police officers is something we as citizens pay for."

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University studies cited by the Smoking Policy Institute, a Seattle-based organization that helps businesses address smoking-in-the-workplace issues, have estimated that a worker who smokes costs his employer between \$1,000 and \$4,600 a year in absenteeism, insurance penalties and even property damage.

"It's becoming more and more common for companies to decline to hire smokers," said Robert Rosner, executive director of the Smoking Policy Institute. "But the practice is almost always more subtle than making employees sign a pledge never to smoke and threatening to terminate them if they do."

Rosner said the public outcry earlier this year over a threat by USG Acoustical Products Co. to fire its factory workers who did not quit smoking, and the subsequent retraction of that threat, has confused the smoking discrimination issue in the minds of employers, making many unsure what their rights are.

"Both the courts and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have ruled that smokers are not a protected class," Rosner said. He and others who follow such issues can list about a dozen police and fire agencies around the country that have instituted 24-hour smoking bans for new employees.

The fire department in Alexandria, Va., a Washington suburb, instituted the nation's first such ban in 1979. It is still in effect and "a great success," according to Capt. Paul Scaffido of the department.

He said no firefighters have quit or been fired over the prohibition, and it has even inspired a few of the old hackers and wheezers in the department to stop smoking and take up jogging.

A new fitness consciousness has hit the Skokie Police Department in the wake of the anti-smoking policy, and about 10 of the stouter officers have enrolled in weight reduction programs. Chief Miller himself has dropped 36 pounds, he said.

"We're actively dealing with the whole health issue," said Skokie Patrolman Carlo Carlotta, 26, who forswore his occasional cigar when he joined the department seven months ago. The smoking ban surprised him, he said, because he'd never heard of such a thing.

Neither had John Kane's classmates at the Chicago Police Academy. "Most of them were smokers," he said. "They said they'd sooner not take the job than have to live with something like that. They were surprised the village was getting away with it."

Also surprised were the Skokie trustees and Mayor Albert Smith, who said they were not aware that the ban was even in effect until it came up in otherwise-routine discussions and ratification of rules and regulations in October.

The five-member Police and Fire Commission had adopted the regulation with virtually no fanfare, first for new firemen, then for new policemen.

"It's a frightening thing," said Trustee Fritzshall, the most outspoken opponent of the regulation at the board meeting. "We say it's for the health

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of the departments, but what's next? I don't think it's healthy to eat a lot of fatty meats. I don't think it's healthy to imbibe too many spirits. Are we going to tell a man he can have one cocktail Saturday night but not three? What he can eat? Then when he can have sex with his wife?"

The trustees voted to ratify the rules package despite their objections to the smoking proviso, but village Corporation Counsel Barbara Meyer said their approval was a pro-forma acknowledgment" anyway and not technically necessary in order for the regulations to be in effect.

Bud Kelley, a Springfield-based lobbyist for the Illinois Association of Tobacco and Candy Distributors, who recently spoke out against a new Skokie ordinance restricting smoking in public places, said the police and fire regulations "are not right." The Tobacco Institute in Washington seconded his opinion.

But spokesmen for the American Cancer Society in New York and the International Association of Firefighters union in Washington expressed their support for the 24 hour ban for recruits.

Trustee Frank McCabe said he likes the idea, too. "Cops are heroes in the eyes of kids," he said. "They're role models, even when they're off the job. They shouldn't have cigarettes in their mouths."

At least they'd better not. Not Skokie cops. Not even in a foreign country in a basement behind a partition under the cover of darkness. Not ever.

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