

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

On Monday, Nebraska will become the 16th state to have a state law that requires workplaces, restaurants and bars to be 100 percent smoke-free.

All of Imperial, except for the Eagles Club and VFW, has been that way for awhile. Therefore, the Nebraska Smoke-Free Air Law affects only those two establishments immediately.

Chase County Community Hospital, Imperial Manor, the courthouse, the city offices and all restaurants have been smoke-free for a number of years.

Most privately-owned businesses have also discouraged smoking for years.

Managers for both the Eagles Club and VFW are taking a “wait and see” approach to the problem of accommodating smokers while obeying the law.

Charlie Beard of the Eagles Club said smokers will be able to use the beer garden on the south side of the building. “They’re perfectly fine there, but it’s not really handy,” he observed.

As for any more permanent structures for smokers, Beard said, “We’re waiting for further guidance from the powers that be before we put anything permanent in.”

Darlene Jens of the VFW said that members at this time don’t plan to erect a smoking structure.

“In the summertime I’m not too worried,” she said. “They can go sit in their cars.” She also said summer is a slow time, as members are in the field, “laking” or playing golf.

“We’re not going to build it if business drops,” she stated. It will cost \$2,000-\$3,000 for a “bus-stop type deal,” that will need to be elevated to escape rain runoff from the VFW roof to the south, Jens stated.

“Everybody says we’ll survive it,” she said.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has been fielding questions about outdoor smoking areas, which are allowed by the law. Such areas must have a minimum of 20 percent of the total wall area permanently open to the outdoors.

The Nebraska State Fire Marshal’s Office has developed a list of construction and safety reminders to help business owners develop outdoor smoking areas. Guidance and other information is available online at www.smokefree.ne.gov.

A recent survey conducted by the DHHS showed that 80 percent of all Nebraskans, smokers and non-smokers alike, support the law, and nearly 82 percent of Nebraskans think having a law prohibiting smoking inside is important.

Additionally, the DHHS said over 86 percent of Nebraskans agree that restaurants and bars in Nebraska will be healthier for employees and customers once the law goes into effect.

Jens said of her establishment, “People didn’t get to vote on it, and that’s why they’re upset.”

The only exceptions to the law are:

Up to 20 percent of hotel rooms;

Tobacco-only retailers;

Facilities researching the health effects of smoking;

Private residences, except when a residence is being used as a licensed child care program;

Cigar bars.