

# Redwood Co. first in the state to pass smoking ordinance in daycare, foster care

The Redwood County Commissioners voted unanimously to pass an ordinance which prevents any day care owners in the county from smoking in either their homes, garages or their vehicles used to transport children.

The measure, which is the first of its kind in the state, takes effect November 1.

Start Noticing, a coalition working to eliminate the harmful effects of tobacco use and exposure, especially among vulnerable youth, was the lead agency on getting the measure passed.

Ann Christensen, who is with Start Noticing in Redwood Falls worked tirelessly to push the measure through.

"The purpose was to protect the public health, welfare and safety by better ensuring the ability of Redwood County residents, specifically children, to breathe safe and uncontaminated air," said Christensen. "Specifically to protect the vulnerable populations, specifically children, from second hand tobacco smoke as it is a known cause of so many respiratory and other illnesses both later in life and now."

The ordinance, which also covers foster care, will be administered through the Redwood County Human Services department until December 31, 2012.

As of January 1, 2013, the ordinance will be administered through Southwest Health and Human Services

which is expected to include a five county region made up of Redwood, Rock, Pipestone, Lincoln, Lyon and Murray counties.

Under the Freedom to Breathe Act of 2007, smoking is not allowed anywhere within the indoor areas of a Minnesota licensed day care center, family home day care or group family day care provider home during hours of operation.

The ordinance will extend that to include any home where daycare or foster care services are provided during, any time of the day, both during operation and after hours.

"Since kids don't have the ability to protect themselves we think we had to do this to prevent their exposure to second hand smoke," said Redwood County Commissioner Al Kokesch. "We don't like too much government mandates but in this case we think it was a good thing. We don't think it will affect too many providers. It was the right thing to do."

## Enforcement

"If it is determined that anyone is smoking in an indoor area of a licensed day care or foster care home or in a vehicle used to transport children, either through a complaint or

inspection, the human services department will make a home visit to review this ordinance with the provider," said Christensen. "Upon the provider's refusal to comply or a second failed inspection, a written notice will be sent." If the provider is still non-compliant after a third notice, letters will be sent to children's parents (day care) or no further placements will be made (foster care).

"This isn't about telling people they can't smoke," noted Christensen. "It is about protecting children who can't protect themselves."

Leading up to the vote, a video was produced by the Redwood Area Hospital staff which spelled out the number of illnesses that can be traced to second and third hand smoke.

"Thank you to the commissioners, day care providers, foster care providers, Start Noticing coalition members, and parents for your help and dedication in passing this ordinance," said Christensen. "This ordinance will make a huge impact on all children in foster care and day cares in Redwood County. It won't last only for today, but for years to come."