

# Smoking laws produce quirky results for casino workers

Workers at Ameristar Kansas City Casino and Hotel who are smokers must step outside for a puff.

When their break is over, many must return to duty on the gaming floor – where gamblers are permitted to light up but the workers can't while they're on the job.

"We used to have a smoking area inside for our team members, but they can't anymore because the city ordinance prohibits that," said Ameristar spokeswoman Roxanne Kincaid.

Kansas City's nearly year-old smoking ordinance exempts casino floors from its near blanket ban on smoking in public places but otherwise requires a "smoke-free workplace for all employees."

That rule chases employee smokers outside, where some have started to complain that the casino has done nothing to ease their exposure to harsh winter weather.

The law is pretty much the same at Harrah's North Kansas City Casino and Hotel, but puffing policies there work a little differently under the casino's interpretation of North Kansas City's no-smoking rules.

"Workers have access to an employees-only smoking break room just off the casino floor," said general manager Tom Cook.

"We also have an outside area out our backdoors where we just constructed a covered awning area" for smokers, he added. "It's not a pleasant experience" in the winter, admitted Cook, "but what can you do? It's way too expensive to provide a heated place outside for employees to smoke. And I think our employees understand that."

Meanwhile, patrons who smoke may be confused by Harrah's policies.

Like Kansas City, North Kansas City prohibits smoking in all non-gambling venues, including restaurants, bars and public concourse areas.

While Ameristar removed ashtrays from its concourse areas, Harrah's left its combination ashtray/trash receptacles in place.

"We still have to ask people to put cigarettes out," said Cook, so the ashtrays were left so smokers would have a place to snuff out their butts.

But isn't the presence of an ashtray an invitation to smoke?

Not at all, said Cook.

"We have signs posted for no smoking," he said. "People are slowly coming around. We don't have too many problems with it. It's less and less every week and every month."

The Argosy Casino Hotel & Spa in Riverside is the metro area's most hospitable retreat for smokers – which may help explain why the suburban casino has been gaining market share this year while Harrah's and Ameristar have slipped.

Patrons can smoke in designated areas in Argosy dining venues, bars and concourse areas, and on the casino floor.

One floor of Argosy's hotel is also set aside for smokers.

The rules in Kansas City and North Kansas City allow up to 25 percent of hotel rooms to be set aside for smokers – and sometimes more when big conventions are in town to "meet the demands" of a large group.

The Isle of Capri casino falls under Kansas City's rules. Executives there could not be reached for comment.