Policy clouded with smoke
State law requires Rider to ban all smoking inside the residence halls

By Jordana Tusman

Smoking was recently prohibited in dormitories at all public and private colleges in the state of New Jersey, according to a bill of legislation signed Aug. 22 by N.J. acting Governor, Richard Codey.

In compliance with the bill, the recently implemented smoking policy at Rider now requires students to smoke outside of their dormitories at a distance that is safely away from the doors. “There is not yet a stipulated specific distance from the building that the smoker can smoke,” said Residence Life Director Cindy Threatt, but the smoker “must stand far enough away from a building so that the smoke does not enter [the building].”

Even before the state of New Jersey passed the new bill, according to Threatt, “a conversation was started by the Residence Hall Association (RHA) and the Facilities Task Force about smoking in the residence halls,” and RHA then put together a survey of students’ opinions concerning smoking in the residence halls and Greek houses. “Over 60 percent who responded said [smoking] should be prohibited in the rooms,” said Threatt. “There were also students who were concerned about allergies and their health, and it was a pretty strong response to include the policy in existing smoking rooms, as well as the New Building.”

Since the addition of the new policy, senior Lisa Griguoli feels “more comfortable” now. “I am a non-smoker and I think it’s safer having smoke-free buildings because there is less of a chance of starting fires,” she said.

Others, like junior Stephanie Hensle, agreed with Griguoli, and said because she has “a great sense of smell, the lack of smoke in the building makes me happy.”

“I am not a smoker so I think the new policy is wonderful,” said Hensle. “Maybe this inconvenience to smokers will even help them to quit.”

A smoker, junior Nicole Estrella, agreed that the new policy might help smokers to quit, and said that she now smokes less. “I believe the new smoking policy is very beneficial,” Estrella said. “Since we’re forced to go outside to smoke, no one in the building will be subjected to it against their will, and now my clothes don’t smell bad.”

Some were willing to see the impending issue from both sides, like non-smoker sophomore Daryl Hawkins. “I’m kind of torn with the whole policy, because if people want to smoke in their rooms, that’s their decision; but at the same time, I can see where the university is coming from by trying to eliminate a fire risk,” Hawkins said.

However, not all students were as optimistic or as happy with the new policy, and felt less inclined to jump on the smoke-free bandwagon. “I think the policy is going to be a big problem for students who are sophomores or older,” said junior Alyssa Berger. “They know what it’s like to be allowed to smoke in their room and now they have to go outside, so they’re going to see it as an inconvenience,” she said.

“There are a lot of smokers on our campus and they probably feel as if they pay enough money to go here. For $35,000 a year, I should be able to smoke in math class!” Estrella said.

Many, like Berger, believe the policy still has a long way to go in helping to accommodate students. “I think the policy would be completely acceptable, and actually pretty good, if they provided students with a general smoking area in the building like one of the lounges,” said senior Peter Boccone.

“Although I’m not a smoker, I don’t think people should have to stand in the freezing snow just to smoke,” he said.

Boccone also wanted “common areas for smokers [or] ashtrays around the common areas outside.” Not only will these accommodations make smokers feel less singled out, but it will also help to maintain a less cigarette butt-lined campus.

“There are already cigarette butts all around my building and it hasn’t been much more than two weeks yet,” said junior Jennifer Zimmerman. “Imagine what it will look like in a couple months.”

Conover Residence Director Mariel Pagan was a little more hopeful. “Cigarette butt littering may increase, but I think people want to preserve this campus,” said Pagan. “There are so many nice new additions to campus that hopefully everyone wants to keep it up.”

While the abundance of cigarette butts is something the policy must still work on, it at least indicates to the students and staff how effectively the policy seems to be working. “Like all rules, there are going to be the people who follow them and the people who don’t, but I think with the $50 fine for students found smoking in their rooms, there is more cooperation from them,” said Hawkins.

According to Threatt, students have been “excellent in responding to the new policy in the residence halls and Greek houses.” “I hear that a lot of students are abiding by it and have heard of only one incidence of documentation, so I think students are really handling this in a good and responsible way,” Threatt said.

Only time will tell if the new policy will continue to be supported with cooperation throughout the remainder of the year, but come winter, students may be less willing. “I think people will follow the policy because of the fine and new smoke detectors,” said Berger. “However, in the winter or when it rains, it might be a totally different story.”