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Anti-tobacco advocates mum on announcement topic
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Local anti-tobacco advocates have called a press conference for this morning.

One of them, Mike Salkin, declined to say what the press conference will cover.

Omaha area groups previously have said they intend to circulate petitions for a smoking ban in the city.

The Metro Omaha Medical Society last year obtained formal petitions from the city to use for gathering signatures. Medical society representatives said at the time they wanted a ban modeled after the one adopted by the City of Lincoln and hoped to place the issue on the November 2006 ballot.

The Lincoln ban that went into effect Jan. 1, 2005, prohibits smoking in restaurants, bars and other public places.

The first task for those behind an Omaha petition drive would be to gather the signatures of 9,300 registered Omaha voters. If the election commissioner verifies those signatures, the ban would go before the City Council.

If the council rejected the ban, it would go to voters.

Mike Kelley, a lobbyist for a group of Nebraska bars and restaurants that has opposed smoking bans, said Wednesday that Lincoln's ban has devastated some businesses in that city.

He said that the dangers of secondhand smoke remain a large question mark and that groups pursuing smoking bans should realize that bars and restaurants will change on their own as the number of smokers declines.

"Why they think government needs to do this, I don't know," Kelley said.

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