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Training sessions planned for petition circulators

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An Omaha group is holding meetings in the next few days to train people on how to circulate petitions to ban smoking in indoor workplaces.

Organizers must collect about 9,300 valid signatures from registered voters to put the petition on the November ballot. They announced the meetings at a press conference this morning.

The proposed ban would allow exceptions for a few kinds of businesses, including hotels, nursing homes and enterprises in private residences, but would exempt for two years stand-alone bars that offer only limited food service and do not admit people younger than 18.

If passed, the ordinance would go into effect Jan. 2, 2007.

The petition drive meetings will be 4 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. Thursday at Swanson Library at 90th and Dodge Streets, 4 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. Friday at Benson Library at 60th and Binney Streets and Saturday from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Willa Cather Library at 44th and Center Streets.

Wednesday's press conference was delayed about 10 minutes after Will Prout, who owns pool halls in Omaha and Lincoln, showed up and spoke about his opposition to the ban. He said Lincoln's smoking ban has crushed his business in that city and repeatedly asked the petition drive organizers why they want to put him out of business.

Organizers responded by citing the health risks posed by secondhand smoke and said Prout should not discriminate against nonsmokers.

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