



After the ban

Will smoke-free stadiums mean more litter on our streets?

When Coventry City Football Club banned smoking inside its then new Ricoh Arena ground in autumn 2005, Dave Rose of the Sky Blue Army fanzine came up with a memorable quote. A non-smoker himself, he foresaw unhappiness among some fans. "Some people need a smoke watching Coventry City," he said.

Coventry was one of the first football clubs to ban smoking in their grounds. Others, including Manchester City, Norwich and Sunderland soon followed and the Football League have now issued guidance that all stadiums are to go smoke-free at the beginning of the 2007-08 season.

When Norwich football club announced their ban, a spokesman was quoted as saying: "The ban includes all the seats, the concourses and the lounge areas. We will appeal to people to use their common sense, and if they do see someone lighting up they should ask them to stop. If they do not they should speak to the stewards, who will take appropriate action."

Swansea City football club have gone a step further. There have been several instances of stewards being physically threatened when telling fans to stub out their cigarettes. Now, the club is telling offenders that unless they comply, they'll be ejected and face a possible ban from the ground. In extreme circumstances, a game may even be abandoned.

Banning smoking in stadiums does give rise

to difficult issues. As Malcolm Clarke of the Football Supporters' Association says: "One of the problems with smoking in all-seater stadiums is that it is not possible to move if someone next to you lights up, and that can spoil the enjoyment. On the other hand, some fans see it as part of the game and cannot cope without a cigarette when their nerves are frazzled."

The Government's legislation, which takes effect 2 April in Wales, 30 April in Northern Ireland and 1 July in England, will cover all enclosed or substantially enclosed public places and workplaces. While it is a grey area whether stadiums are covered by the definition of the legislation, the pre-emptive action on the part of bodies such as the Football League acknowledges an intention to accept the spirit of the legislation.

According to Charles Hamshaw-Thomas of Bath-based corporate social responsibility consultancy CSR Solutions, "There is a definite cultural shift against smoking in public areas where others who may be offended by smoke are present, whether or not it's specifically covered by the new legislation. As stadiums go smoke-free in the near future, there will clearly be enforcement issues but that won't be the only consideration. Litter, for example, will be an issue, and particularly in the immediate vicinity as people have a last cigarette before entering the ground and another immediately on leaving."

"Paul Sergeant, Chief Executive of Cardiff's

Millennium Stadium, has said that the 2005 'Noise and Confusion' concert with Oasis and the Foo Fighters generated 12 tonnes of litter on its own. If one assumes that a significant element of that was cigarette related litter, a large proportion of that rubbish would now simply be moved to the surrounding streets. And with recent Government proposals that businesses be held legally liable for cigarette litter outside their premises, this is clearly a cause for concern. It's more than a safety and comfort issue – it's an important stadium management issue."

But Hamshaw-Thomas believes there are some clear actions stadiums can take to protect themselves and the surrounding environment on the litter problem. "While major grounds, particularly football stadiums, have in recent decades become used to handling change as various Acts of Parliament have, for example, banned alcohol and standing, there have always been difficulties in terms of implementing, interpreting and enforcing the new requirements. There's a famous story about a fan being ejected from a ground for carrying a Cornish pasty, just in case it was used as an offensive weapon.

"This time it's simpler. Whether or not somebody is smoking is far more cut and dried. Just as not smoking in public places is set to become part of the culture, so must an acceptance that those who smoke understand their responsibilities to dispose



cleanly and tidily of their cigarette butts and packaging.

“Clearly, making this happen is not purely the responsibility of venue operators – I believe manufacturers, retailers and local authorities also have their roles to play.”

The provision of fixed bins is an important element of any disposal infrastructure, and Hamshaw-Thomas also points to the important contribution that public awareness programmes and the provision of portable ashtrays has made to successful local authority campaigns aimed at reducing cigarette litter in their towns. As he says, “More than 150 local authorities have run awareness campaigns in recent years, some of which have been highly successful. In Colchester, for example, there was an 86 percent reduction in cigarette litter during the four weeks of their 2006 campaign. Colchester United Football Club, already a smoke-free venue at the time, played a prominent role in that campaign – and the provision of personal ashtrays was an integral element of it.”

He believes there is a lesson here for stadium operators. “Football clubs in particular, and stadiums generally, have a

high profile in the local community. This means they are well-positioned to promote the change of smokers’ littering behaviour, which we all

want to see. Encouraging retailers to sell personal ashtrays through nearby outlets, providing information and appropriate bins would demonstrate their commitment to overcoming local littering – which affects everyone - and meet their responsibilities to the community,” he says.

Colchester is far from alone in demonstrating their effectiveness. Asda, for example, was closely involved in ENCAMS’ (the environmental charity that runs Keep Britain Tidy) 2006 campaign to reduce cigarette littering, in which it gave away 250,000 personal ashtrays. This contributed to a 35% reduction in levels of cigarette litter where the campaign was implemented.

But according to Hamshaw-Thomas, one important question remains still to be answered: “Who’s going to tell Keith Richards not to smoke during a Stones gig?”

