



Times photo by Kimm Anderson, kanderson@stcloudtimes.com

The new C-3 campus convenience store at St. Cloud State University's Atwood Memorial Center doesn't advertise that it sells tobacco products. Cigarettes and chewing tobacco are kept in a drawer behind the register.

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Smoking room comes under fire

By Kate Kompas
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Local health officials and St. Cloud State University leaders are lobbying students to consider closing the lone indoor smoking room on campus and to stop tobacco sales in the student union.

Student leaders, however, have not been persuaded to take up the issues.

Besides wanting a more healthful campus, anti-smoking advocates say they are trying to give students some real-world experience. State

Smoking, tobacco at other colleges

■ **College of St. Benedict/St. John's University:** Smoking is prohibited in university buildings, with the exception of where the monks live. Tobacco products are not sold in

university bookstores.

■ **St. Cloud Technical College:** Smoking isn't permitted indoors. Tobacco products are not sold in the college's store.

Source: School officials

are for tighter restrictions on smoking in public places, if not an outright ban.

"All of that is based on good, sound public health policy," said Nathan Church, vice president for student life and development at St. Cloud State. "From

want our students to essentially look at the same kind of data we have looked at and make their decision accordingly."

At St. Cloud State, the discussion centers on the Apocalypse Room, the indoor smoking area

Smoking

in the Atwood Memorial Center, and tobacco sales in Atwood. Whether smoking and tobacco sales will be banned from Atwood is up to students, Church said.

"We were just rather appalled that they had a smoking room on campus," said Jodi Rohe, coordinator of Tobacco Free Communities at Central Minnesota Heart Center. "When you look at any other state-run facility, you don't run into that kind of a problem."

The Apocalypse Room has seating for about 60 students, said Margaret Vos, Atwood's director. During its peak times, 200 to 300 people use it every day.

Her staff had not heard any complaints from students about the Apocalypse Room, Vos said. Its doors are supposed to stay closed, and the room has its own air-handling system. The room is temporarily closed because of remodeling.

A group of community and university leaders met with a small group of St. Cloud State student leaders last month to talk about the Apocalypse Room and tobacco sales on campus.

Jennifer Kotila, public relations chairwoman for student government, said the topics haven't come up in student meetings since.

"We will not discuss anything ... not brought up to us by the students," said Kotila, a senior. "Since it's only been community members, we are not discussing it."

Kotila said she did not know if any members of student govern-

ment had surveyed other students to see what they think about the Apocalypse Room and tobacco sales on campus.

Changing culture

Acceptance of smoking on college campuses has changed dramatically in the past decades, just as it has in many workplaces and restaurants. Campuses have changed from places where professors smoked during classes to where smoking students are asked to stay away from doorways and not light up in dorms.

"Back in '86, when I was first hired, it was a different era — smoking was allowed anywhere," Vos said.

The Apocalypse Room became the university's indoor smoking area in the mid-1990s, Vos said.

Rohe said one of her biggest concerns is that college students are one of the few demographics in which the number of smokers is increasing. She cited statistics from the National Institute on Drug Abuse that said the number of college students who reported smoking in the past 30 days rose by one third from 1991 to 1999.

"Basically, college smokers are sometimes perceived as social smokers. ... A lot of college students anticipate that once they receive their diploma, they'll quit smoking.

"But those same students would never envision themselves smoking in a professional setting. That really speaks to how uneducated they are about the addiction. It's not something they are going to be able to walk away from in four years," Rohe said.

Surveys show that at St. Cloud State, about 32 percent of stu-

dents have smoked a cigarette within the past month, said Troy Shafer, health educator with St. Cloud State Student Health Services.

Revenue

Tobacco sales at student unions bring money back to the buildings. The convenience store in Atwood, called C-3, just opened. Cigarettes and tobacco are sold there, although they are kept in a drawer behind the counter and aren't advertised.

Before C-3, tobacco was sold at Atwood's information desk, where students bought about \$80,000 worth of tobacco products a year, Vos said.

"All the revenue that we generate in the student union goes directly back into the student union, so it does offset fees," she said. "If you lose the revenue, then fees would have to go up, or you just kind of readjust and do things differently."

Money isn't the most influential factor, Church said.

"I don't think the amount of revenue that is coming in, that's as significant a concern as is the issue of 'is this a service to our students,'" he said.

Atwood's advisory board members, the majority of whom are students, set the policies for the building.

"If the students decide there is a need for a change, we'll certainly respond to that," Vos said.

At the U

The University of Minnesota also has been criticized in recent years for selling tobacco products in its three student unions. The Minnesota Medical Association

passed a resolution at its recent annual conference urging the university to stop selling tobacco.

In fall 2001, the University of Minnesota's student health advisory committee also requested the sales stop.

After talking with students, the board decided 16-1 to keep tobacco in the student unions, said Maggie Towle, director of the Twin Cities students' union.

Danielle Baker, 23, was part of the group that asked the student union board to stop selling tobacco. She is now a second-year medical student at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

When she was a student in the Twin Cities, Baker considered herself as one of the owners of the student union, which is paid for through student fees.

"I didn't think that I should be a part of something that I thought was wrong," she said.

Towle said she knows talk of a ban will resurface. Stopping tobacco sales on campus is inevitable, she said.

"With Hennepin County going smoke-free, it's definitely a trend, and I think students are going to have to take a hard look at the sales," Towle said.