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### NC county votes yes to smoking ban

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Hertford Co., N.C. is considering pushing smokers out of public buildings.

For generations people in Hertford Co. have made their living growing tobacco, and smoking has just been part of society.

In fact, some tells 13News that in the not so distant past, people still smoked in the grocery store. However, this year, the General Assembly gave local governments the authority to ban smoking in public places, and Monday, Hertford Co. met its hopes of finally taking action.

At a Public Hearing Monday, the smoking ban passed with a 6-0 vote, with two people absent and one vacant.

Though no smoking signs are popping up all over the county now, just a few years ago the idea of "no smoking" was unheard of.

Five years ago, Brenda Velazquez opened Mug Shotz Café.

"People in this community told me that if I didn't have smoking in here that I wouldn't get the clientele, that they wouldn't come here because that's what they were used to," she said.

However, she opened her café as one of the first non-smoking restaurants in town. Today, her business is thriving, despite being deep in the heart of tobacco country.

However, getting everyone to accept no smoking is still a tough sell in Hertford Co., but County Health Director Curtis Dickson is trying.

"There is no safe limit on second hand smoke," said Dickson. "Second hand smoke is as deadly as smoking itself and because of that we have an obligation to protect the public."

That's why the county is considering a ban that would end smoking in all public buildings and outside of the Health Department and Social Services.

"It will make it difficult for me, but it may also help some that are trying to quit, I guess," said smoker Jennifer Edwards. "By banning it might help the ones that are really trying to quit."

"They make tobacco here," said smoker Montez Eley. "It's the main source of income, so I don't see why if you want to smoke that's on you."

This small step would still put North Carolina far behind its neighbor states when it comes to taking a stand against tobacco, but many residents hope it's the beginning of North Carolina's efforts to catch up.

"This is something long coming that should have been done a long time ago," said Velazquez.

The ban will go into effect January first.

Health officials hope this is just the beginning. They would like to see bans on smoking in restaurants next.