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Lighting Up: Employers help workers to snuff out smokes

Companies offer variety of cessation programs

By Nick Cusack
Staff writer

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Smokers and tobacco users who work for places with wellness clinics can get some extra support if they want to quit, and usually for a low cost.

The City of Shelbyville recently opened a wellness clinic for city employees, which Mayor Tom DeBaun hopes will significantly decrease insurance costs.

The clinic will provide smoking cessation drugs to city employees free of charge. Employees are given a guaranteed block of time to talk about issues they might be having, which could include smoking.

Before the clinic opened, the city didn't have many programs to encourage people to quit.

Jody Branum, city personnel supervisor, said that in 2010, she offered a smoking cessation program through Major Hospital.

"I had two people attend," she said.

They did quit smoking, though not necessarily because of that program, she said.

The city also provides a gym for employees. She said those wishing to smoke sometimes find it's easier with exercise.

The city, she said, also abides by state law. Smokers must be eight feet from doorways and no smoking in city vehicles.

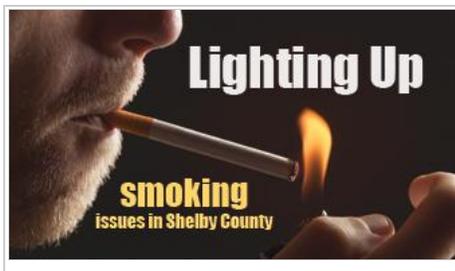
On-site clinics such as the new one offered by the city have become popular among large employers. The efforts hope to keep overall insurance costs down by providing immediate care and long-term wellness programs, such as smoking cessation help. Major Hospital and Knauf Insulation have long offered similar programs to employees, for example.

Local auto parts manufacturer PK USA also has a wellness clinic. Those who want to go get smoking cessation help can go to the clinic and receive free, confidential advice and support.

"Through our wellness program, our nurses coach our employees who smoke and want to quit or reduce the level of smoking," Vice President Bill Kent said. "Our nurses can also refer smokers to state-sponsored programs which provide additional assistance to smokers."

Kent noted the high number of Hoosiers who smoke and the high number of cancer deaths in the state. The wellness center depends on "coaching," where nurses help develop strategies for employees to live a better life, if they wish.

"We can't tell people to quit smoking," Kent said.



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