

## **Longwood University professor maps smoke-free restaurants in state**

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More than 90 percent of Virginians -- nearly 7 million people -- live in localities in which the majority of restaurants are smoke-free, a Longwood University geographer has found.

David Hardin, associate professor of geography, set up a Web site called "Clearing the Haze" last week as the General Assembly began debate on a statewide ban on smoking in restaurants and bars.

But Hardin is not sure what impact his smoke-free statistics will have.

"The data really does cut both ways," he said yesterday. "I suppose it could support either side."

Hardin used data from the Virginia Department of Health's Office of Environmental Health Services to map the proportion of smoke-free restaurants for Virginia's 134 counties and independent cities.

Less than 10 percent of Virginians -- 772,112 people -- live in the 33 localities where less than 50 percent of restaurants are smoke-free, his analysis found.

In contrast, a majority of restaurants are nonsmoking in 101 localities, or more than 75 percent of counties and cities. Those include the metro areas of Richmond, Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia.

In Henrico County, 70 percent of restaurants are smoke-free, and 65 percent of Hanover County eateries ban smoking. In Richmond, 58 percent are smoke-free, while 56 percent are smoke-free in Chesterfield County.

Hardin said his findings for urban and suburban areas did not come as a surprise. But he said he did not expect to find localities in the Shenandoah Valley and western Virginia to be as smoke-free as they are. That includes Craig County, which is the only locality that is 100 percent smoke-free.

The least smoke-free localities are Charlotte County and Petersburg, he said. Both have a smoke-free rate of 8 percent.

Hardin said his site is not meant to promote either side of the smoking-ban debate, although he does have a view on the issue. For the health of his family, he said, he hopes the ban will be approved.

Still, he thinks his analysis could be used either way. Opponents could use the research to argue there is no need for the legislation, because so many restaurants already are smoke-

free. But supporters could use that point to argue "you might as well cover the entire state."