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## WKU students welcome shift to tobacco-free campus

AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) 36 min ago

Thousands of cigarette butts are collected Wednesday, March 20, 2019, during a Kick Butts Day event at WKU's campus. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Next year, Western Kentucky University will enforce a campuswide ban on all tobacco and vaping products, a victory for stakeholders who pushed for the change.

“I think it’s definitely a step in the right direction,” said Amelia Bowen, a WKU freshman from Campbellsville, in response to an announcement from the university Monday that it will become a smoke-free and tobacco-free campus beginning Jan. 1.

The university’s new policy said the use of all tobacco products is prohibited “on all property that is owned, operated, leased, occupied or controlled by the university.” Along with faculty, staff and students, the policy applies to campus visitors, alumni, contractors and any other service representative or vendor.

“I personally am pretty happy about that,” said Ella Hagan, a freshman from Bowling Green who said the smell of cigarette smoke sickens her.

For Cecilia Watkins, a public health professor who led the initiative with the help of a grant from the American Cancer Society, the change is the result of a two-year effort. A tobacco-free task force made up of 25 people from across campus organized outreach efforts and drafted the policy that was ultimately approved by WKU’s Board of Regents.

Previously, WKU provided designated smoking areas across campus, but Watkins said tobacco users often didn’t comply with the policy. More importantly, it also sent the wrong message – that smoking should be normalized, she said.

“What we prefer to have is a healthy environment for faculty and staff and students to work and learn in,” Watkins said.

Enforcement aims to take on a bottom-up approach. The policy said

students, faculty and staff will be encouraged to “respectfully inform” others about WKU’s status as a tobacco-free campus and that compliance will be achieved through education and awareness efforts about resources for quitting.



Neither Hagan nor Bowen use tobacco or vaping products, but both agree the move will be better for all students in the long run. Many of Hagan’s friends smoke or use electronic cigarettes or vape pens, she said.

“They all say that they want to stop. They all say that they want to quit, so here’s a push,” Hagan said, adding that the change should only be a temporary inconvenience for students who use tobacco.

Bowen agreed, adding the ban will give students “a gentle nudge” to quit.

Users might be frustrated at the start, but “they’re going to thank the university years from now when they’re not dying from lung cancer,” Bowen said.

– *More information, including frequently asked questions and the policy itself, is available online at [wku.edu/tobaccofree](http://wku.edu/tobaccofree).*

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## MORE INFORMATION



Kicking butts: WKU students organize cigarette cleanup

# Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.

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