

Poker Runs, Charity Raffles Banned In Kansas

Poker runs have become very popular fundraisers, but they are also technically illegal in the state of Kansas. They are considered gambling under state law. Organizers of many such events say this is news to them. According to Kansas gaming law, any activity that involves consideration, chance and prize is gambling. The Kansas Lottery and state-owned casinos are exempt, but charities are not. Kansas is one of just four states without a charity exemption in gambling statutes. "We're a nonprofit organization," said Shane Toney, President of Fire and Iron Station 54, which organizes an annual poker run. "We're trying to help as many people as we can. Toney and other organizers are now scrambling to change the event to it is legal. "We're doing a lot of charity work and we didn't mean to step on gaming laws, but it seems like we are now," he said. "Maybe there's a loophole that needs to be sown up in the Kansas gaming laws to help out charities." According to those state gaming laws, poker runs -- fundraisers where motorcycle riders draw a card at five stops and the best poker hand wins -- are illegal. Raffle drawings can be illegal, too. Kansas gaming law has prompted the organizers of the Thunder on the Plains motorcycle rally in Dodge City to cancel this year's event, which was scheduled for next weekend. "We give away a bike every year and we sell chances for the bike giveaway," said Mel Watson, director of the rally. "This year, the gaming commission came down and said, 'It's illegal, it is gambling, it is a game of chance.'" Watson said Thunder on the Plains has raised more than \$60,000 for the families of southwest Kansas military members over the last six years. "It's for good causes and they're putting the stop to us," Watson said. "This law has been on the books for, I guess, a few years and they haven't enforced it." Organizers of Thunder on the Plains learned about the law too late to make any changes for this year's event, but Watson promised the rally will be back in 2013. "We are planning on having a rally next year, in the later part of August and, one way or another, we're going to do it," he said. "We're bound and determined to do it." As for the Fire and Iron poker run, this year's event will happen as scheduled Sept. 8. "Our event is still planned and we're working to make it a game of skill and stay compliant within the Kansas gaming laws," Toney said. The state says the best way to keep a poker run within the law is to remove the element of chance by having participants throw a dart at cards on a board. Many charity organizers say they will be pushing for a change in state law.

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