

# Smoke-Free Policy: It Just Makes Sense

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Almost one year ago the U.S. Surgeon General issued a report that ended the debate over the controversy surrounding health hazards linked to secondhand smoke. The report could not have been more definitive when it declared that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke and that even brief exposure has an immediate health impact.<sup>1</sup>

## Health Impact

In addition to damaging the lungs, breathing smoke from other people's cigarettes wreaks havoc on the heart and blood vessels. In the short amount of time it takes to eat a meal in a smoke filled restaurant the risk of having a heart attack and heart disease are substantially increased.<sup>2</sup> As a result, individuals who are already known to be at risk for cardiovascular diseases are strongly cautioned to avoid areas where smoking is allowed.<sup>2</sup>

Secondhand smoke is more than a nuisance; it's a killer that should be considered a serious yet preventable public health concern. Curtailing the disease burden that is a consequence of secondhand smoke exposure can be effectively achieved by enacting policies that establish smoke-free environments. Smoke-Free policies benefit everyone including smokers, some of whom will quit as a result.<sup>3</sup>

## Enacting Good Policy

Over the past several years tribal, state, and local governments have begun to protect their citizens by implementing smoking restrictions and smoke-free policies. American Nonsmokers Rights, an organization that monitors smoke-free policy, reports that as of 2007, 22 states and the District of Columbia have 100% smoke-free policies that affect workplaces, restaurants, and/ or bars.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the states, the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana became the first tribal nation to enact a 100% smoke-free ordinance in 2005.

Most tribes within the Aberdeen Area (ND, SD, NE, IA) place some restrictions on public smoking; however, many tribal members are still left unprotected, especially those employed at community centers, tribal offices, restaurants, and casinos. Because there is no safe level of secondhand smoke exposure only 100% smoke-free policies are able to fully protect the non-smoking public and offer the greatest amount of support to smokers trying to quit. Tribal policy makers are encouraged to follow the precedent set by the Blackfeet by enacting policies that: (1) secure 100% smoke-free indoor environments; or (2) secure 100% smoke-free grounds (indoor and outdoor).

## Benefits of Smoke-Free Policies

Several benefits of smoke-free policies are cited in the literature:

<<<<Protects employee and patron health>>>>

Everyone deserves the right to breathe clean air and smoke-free policies are the best way of protecting these rights. Food service workers are more affected by secondhand smoke than any other profession and are 50% more likely to die of lung cancer than the general population.<sup>5,6</sup>

<<<<Lower costs>>>>

Smoke-free restaurants can expect to save \$190 per 1,000 square feet in cleaning costs annually,<sup>7</sup> and typically have a 25 to 30% reduction in fire insurance costs.<sup>8</sup>

<<<<Increases productivity and morale>>>>

Believe it or not, employees taking four 10-minute smoke-breaks a day actually work one month less each year than workers who do not take smoke breaks.<sup>9</sup> In addition, smoking on the job is associated with inefficiency, errors, decreased attentiveness, and eye irritation.

<<<<Reduces absenteeism>>>>

Smokers, on average, miss 6.16 days of work per year due to sickness compared to nonsmokers, who miss 3.86 days of work per year.<sup>10</sup>

<<<<Protection against possible liability>>>>

100% Smoke-free policies eliminate disability and liability claims that can be filed by employees who become ill from secondhand smoke exposure at work.

**Don't be hoodwinked**

Despite the common misconception fostered by tobacco companies, studies have consistently shown that businesses are not negatively impacted by smoke-free policies. Fear of a loss of revenue in restaurants and bars have proven to be unfounded when ordinances are implemented at both the state and local government level. At present 6 tribally-owned casinos maintain smoke-free environments with no loss of revenue.

Another common misconception is that ventilation and air purifying systems can eliminate the risk of secondhand smoke exposure. However, no ventilation system, no matter how costly, can reduce the many health risks associated with secondhand smoke.<sup>1,11</sup>

**Technical Assistance**

There are a number of technical support centers that can assist smoke-free advocates develop policies appropriate to the needs of their communities. Those interested in learning more about the benefits of smoke-free policies should call the National Native Commercial Tobacco Abuse Prevention Network at 1-800-562-4957 or visit [www.keepitsacred.org](http://www.keepitsacred.org).

## Citations

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