

Smoke-Free Zone Adopted Around Bois Forte Buildings



Tribal Government Center with 50-foot Buffer Zone

The Community CHANGE

In early June 2010, Tribal Tobacco Education and Policy (TTEP) Coordinator Daanis Chosa sat at her desk and pulled together a packet of important documents: a copy of language for a resolution on a 50-foot smoke-free buffer zone around tribal buildings, an approval email from the tribal attorney, and a formal agenda request form for going before the Bois Forte Tribal Council. Ms. Chosa had been working on this issue for many months, and was now hopeful that the resolution would be reviewed favorably by the Council members. She sent the packet to the Executive Director of the Bois Forte tribe for placement on the Tribal Council agenda.

On July 7th, 2010, Ms. Chosa was called into the Tribal Council chamber to read the resolution. The Council added clarifying language to allow the ceremonial use of tobacco and exempt the casino, and the resolution then passed with no debate.

Process of creating CHANGE

This historic policy change was part of a larger arc of action to protect Bois Forte tribal members from secondhand smoke that began in the early 90s, starting first with tribal buildings going smoke-free indoors, followed by policy designating that Community Health Representative (CHR) vehicles be smoke free. This action was spearheaded by community champions, such as Jeneal Goggleye, now Health Commissioner, who was a prime force in getting the initial changes in smoke free policy to happen. She recognized the threat of commercial tobacco, and advocated for patients' health above and beyond tribal buildings going smoke-free, such as the need to protect patients from exposure to secondhand smoke during transport by CHRs.

The TTEP program built on these early accomplishments to protect tribal members and visitors from secondhand smoke exposure. During 2009, the TTEP coordinator began providing education to community members and tribal leaders not only on the dangers of secondhand smoke, but also on the growing body of knowledge on the dangers of thirdhand smoke, the toxic residue from cigarettes that clings to materials. But front and center in all education was the critical need to restore non-recreational, cultural use of tobacco as a healing force for change. The TTEP coordinator worked with local spiritual elders and the cultural committee leader to learn about and experience the healing ceremonies, and collaborated on community events to share this knowledge with tribal members, including a Manomin (Wild Rice) Walk and smoke free indoor powwow using traditional tobacco.

A Tribal Council member, Cathy Chavers, met one-on-one with Ms. Chosa, participated in events, and let her know the Council supported her efforts.

In February of 2010, the TTEP coordinator reached out to the tribal attorney for advice on drafting a 50-foot buffer zone policy around all tribal buildings. She had researched other tribal policy initiatives, but wanted input from her own tribal legal team. The attorney worked closely with Ms. Chosa to highlight key points to draft a resolution. She then asked members of the health department, cultural committee, and law enforcement to meet with technical assistance providers to discuss and finalize the resolution. The group added a provision that the policy would include no smoking during after-hours use. The last step before Tribal Council was sending it to the Commissioner of Judicial Services and the Health Commissioner.

Strategies for creating CHANGE

The Bois Forte TTEP program used a variety of strategies to create change:

Doing background research. The TTEP coordinator took time to learn about policy change in general and in Bois Forte in particular. The Coordinator also had supporters who helped her navigate the policy change process specific to Bois Forte.

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Strategies (continued)

Connecting the issues of restoring healthy tradition with reducing danger. Woven together in all Bois Forte education was a message about sacred tradition versus commercial abuse. The coordinator spent many months providing education at community events on dangers of secondhand and thirdhand smoke, plus the importance of smoke free policies. And while not all of the tribal members are traditional, a growing movement to reaffirm and restore culture has taken root in Bois Forte. The TTEP coordinator drew on the knowledge of the cultural committee and spiritual leaders to enhance knowledge of a tobacco tradition of cultural strength and healing.



Culture is Key – Daanis Chosa at tobacco garden, Cathy Chavers at Creation Story Mural in the Government Center

Asking for help. Working with colleagues in key tribal roles helped the TTEP coordinator move forward on policy change. The tribal attorney played a key champion role, crafting a draft resolution, adding stores and vehicles to the policy, and giving advice on how to present the issue. The culture committee and law enforcement participated in reviewing and advising on the policy before it was sent up through the chain of approval at Bois Forte. The coordinator also took advantage of technical assistance from experts in tribal policy, available through the funding agency.

Building on community connections. Bois Forte is a small community, and the coordinator was able to connect with relatives and tribal members with cultural knowledge and in leadership positions. She also collaborated on education with other groups.

Importance of the CHANGE

Evidence continues to mount on the dangers of exposure to commercial tobacco smoke. In a report released in December 2009, the Surgeon General found “Even occasional smoking or *secondhand*

smoke causes immediate damage to one’s organs and poses risk of serious illness or death.” (available at

www.surgeongeneral.gov/)

American Indian people in Minnesota suffer very high

death rates from heart disease, cancer, diabetes and lung disease, and youth have high rates of asthma and infections. Communities are beginning to rise to the challenge of addressing the fact that over 50% of tribal members are using commercial tobacco. According to the US Preventive Task Force, creating 100% smoke-free environments is one the most effective strategies for reducing harm from exposure, but also helping people to quit. Resources such as the Tribal Policy Toolkit (www.keepitsacred.org/toolkit) provide a roadmap for communities to use smoke free policy to improve the health of their people.

Lessons Learned about CHANGE

The personal touch. Try lots of ways to reach people, such as emails and newsletters, but putting up flyers at homes brought more participation.

Build a team and make use of their expertise. Ask for advice and feedback from multiple sectors – legal, law enforcement, culture, tribal leaders, health, etc. – to build support and a stronger policy.

Work your networks. Talk to people you know and get their feedback, better yet, get them involved.

Choose a “Messenger” who will resonate with the community. At Bois Forte, the policy request came from a young leader, with community connections, who learned tradition and integrated the message of how tobacco should be used for healing not harm.

Think ahead. Tribal leaders consider enforcement a major challenge. Have an enforcement plan and partners ready to help *before* policies pass!

Type of Change:	Formal Tribal Policy
Location of Change:	Bois Forte Tribal Buildings
Reach of Change:	150 Tribal building employees (plus visitors)
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