White Earth Creates Smoke-free Policy at Casino

The community CHANGE

The White Earth Health Education Department collaborated with the White Earth tribal council, casino management, and employees to create additional smoke-free space and policies at the Shooting Star Casino and Event Center. As a result, the smoke-free space has increased and includes: a 100% smoke-free event center; 292 (of 390) smoke-free hotel rooms in 2 hotels; 500 sq. feet of smoke-free gaming area; smoke-free service windows; increased smoke-free space in dining areas; a smoke-free bar; and smoke-free offices, meeting rooms, and employee break rooms.

Process of creating CHANGE

The White Earth Health Education Department has been building their tobacco program for nearly 10 years. They have a well established tobacco coalition that has actively worked on 23 policy and program changes to increase smoke-free space, increase traditional tobacco use, and create culturally-specific messages about secondhand smoke. In 2001, they began to educate the community about smoke-free policy work and share community survey results.

By 2005, the coalition began discussing how they could improve smoke-free policy at the Shooting Star Casino Hotel and Event Center. Employees, especially those working at services windows and in the event center, were concerned about exposure to second hand smoke. The tobacco coalition knew it was up to them to ask for more smoke-free space but they didn't think it was possible to create a 100% smoke-free policy. Instead they decided to develop a "chip away" strategy by focusing on small changes over a longer period of time.

> "The tribe is a sovereign nation and this means that it does not have to follow the state-wide Freedom to Breathe Act. This is a huge barrier to furthering our work on smoke-free policy within the casino. We have to continue to take baby steps toward healthier environments." Gina Boudreau, White Earth Health Educator

The coalition began to make a plan by listening to what customers, employees, and community members were saying about smoke-free policy. They gathered information on the complaints about secondhand smoke. In addition, the coalition reviewed results about smoke-free support from statewide and community surveys. According to the surveys, most people preferred smoke-free areas.

The tobacco coalition shared the overwhelming support for smoke-free policy with upper management at the casino and tribe. Open communication with upper management was facilitated throughout the policy process by a tribal council member and three representatives from the casino who were active on the tobacco coalition. The tribal council member and casino representatives (from the safety, human resources, and casino liaison departments) attended meetings with the tribal council, casino management, and gaming commission to share information about the coalition's work. They provided coalition meeting minutes, informed leadership about goals, gained approval to move forward with plans, and shared progress updates.

The White Earth gaming commission was a key player because it monitors all activities at the Shooting Star Casino. It is a tribally operated board of commissioners designed to control and foster growth of the gaming activities of the White Earth reservation. The five members are appointed by the White Earth tribal council and can include tribal council members or commissioners who are not tribal council members.

The relationships between the coalition, gaming commission, and upper management assisted with efforts to identify areas of the casino and event center that could improve smoke free policy. After gaining support from the gaming commission, the coalition worked with managers to add more questions about smoke-free policies to customer satisfaction surveys. The coalition used the casino specific information from the surveys to work with human resources to further clarify areas for improvement.

In 2006, the casino management supported employee cessation by offering the Quit Plan at work program. The White Earth Health Education Department worked with Clearway Minnesota to arrange quarterly cessation support sessions hosted at the casino and event center. Advertisements about tobacco and cessation opportunities were placed in the in-house newspaper and on the TV in break rooms. The success rate was 50% for participants in the first session.

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Process of creating CHANGE (continued)

In 2007, several informal policies, which consist of unwritten agreements or behavior expectations for norm changes, were recommended by the coalition and implemented by casino management as a result of these efforts. The casino management created smoke-free service windows by requesting that the safety division rope off the area around service windows, post no smoking signage, and provide ashtrays for customers to dispose of cigarettes before visiting windows. The alterations to the environment changed the behavior expectations of customers.

Casino management also began to change smoke-free policy at the event center by first adopting informal polices. When large events were hosted at the event center, ashtrays were covered up and guests were asked to smoke outside. Casino management also supported a smoke-free rental option – if customers requested a smoke-free facility for their event it was provided.

In 2008, when the results from the customer surveys revealed that 76% of event center patrons preferred non-smoking areas and customers supported more smoke-free area on the gaming floor, formal policies were written and posted. The upper management at the casino directed the human resource management to draft formal policies related to smoke-free areas within the Shooting Star Casino and Event Center. The new policies established a completely smoke-free event center and increased the amount of smoke-free space. The casino continues to monitor customer satisfaction and evaluate the smoke-free policies by conducting surveys.

> *"You can't sit at your desk and expect to build support. You have to be out...building relationships and social capital. Your presence is what the community remembers."*-Gina Boudreau, White Earth Health Educator

Currently (2009), health educators and the tobacco coalition continue to provide information about their smoke-free policy work as well as the difference between commercial abuse and traditional use (which is only for prayer and healing). Advertisements and articles are still placed in the in-house newspaper and on the televisions in employee break rooms. The coalition planted a traditional tobacco garden behind the casino as an opportunity to teach about traditional uses of tobacco. "Just for 2 hours" is another campaign recently launched by the coalition. To work towards a future all day smoke-free event at Shooting Star Casino and Event Center the coalition hosted a 2 hour smoke-free activity with employees. At the event they encouraged quitting, provided a brown bag lunch, and had the Ciggy Butts mascot provide smoke-free messages. The tobacco coalition will also be advertising "The Great American Smokeout", the third Thursday in November, as a way to keep the smoking issue at the forefront of discussion.

Strategies for the CHANGE

The White Earth tobacco coalition used a variety of strategies in their smoke-free casino policy work including:

Building relationships. Staff built support early by talking about program goals, speaking openly about issues, listening, and avoiding assumptions. They did this by supporting other coalitions, going to events, and attending tribal council meetings.

Educating about policy change. Very early the tobacco coalition started educating the community about smoke-free policy change and why it works. They continue this education to encourage smoke free homes, cars, and workplaces.

Communicating with key leaders. Coalition members included tribal council members and casino management representatives. They generated ideas, communicated goals and progress, and carried out the coalition plan. These individuals were the "middle people" between the coalition and the casino management, gaming commission, and tribal council. Change in these leadership positions is common but the coalition viewed it as an opportunity to build relationships, educate about coalition efforts, and gauge support. The coalition felt it was critical to keep management well informed of past accomplishments and future goals in commercial tobacco prevention and control.

Creating awareness of policy campaign. The health educators worked with casino staff to incorporate messages about secondhand smoke, commercial tobacco abuse, traditional tobacco use, and cessation into advertisements in casino media. They also supported the creation of a traditional tobacco garden at the worksite.

Collecting and using data for planning and evaluation. Background information about existing casino policies and survey data was collected, analyzed, and shared throughout the policy making process to create a plan, demonstrate need, and evaluate smoke-free casino policy.

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Strategies for the CHANGE (continued)

Providing support for quitting. The tobacco program helped with the Quit Plan® at Work program to support quitting. This was continued quarterly until Indian Health Service started a cessation program.

Acknowledge and show appreciation. People like to be recognized for their contributions. It makes them feel valued and keeps them passionate about the work. Remember to celebrate accomplishments often because there are more bumps than successes along the way.

Importance of the CHANGE

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke – it causes illness and death. Regular exposure to secondhand smoke at work can cause a 91% increase in coronary heart disease (Kawachi, et.al, *Circulation*, May 1997; 95: 2374 - 2379). In addition to health issues, secondhand smoke creates a serious financial burden for individuals, communities, and businesses. According to the *Creating Healthier Policies in Indian Casinos* study, most casino leaders perceive that a 100% smoke-free casino would save money (www.indigenouspeoplestf.org/tobacco.html). Workplace smoke-free policies have many benefits for employers, employees, and customers including:

- Support for quitting smoking;
- Lower employee absenteeism;
- Increased employee productivity on-the-job;
- Lower health care costs;
- Lower health and life insurance costs;
- Reduced maintenance and cleaning cost;
- Less damage to furniture and equipment; and
- Decreased risk for fire, explosions, and other accidents related to smoking.

Lessons learned about creating CHANGE

- ❖ Understand that casinos are a source of revenue for the tribe and fears regarding the economy affect this work.
- ❖ Ongoing education that respects the sovereignty of the tribe and their right to make decisions about smoke-free policy is likely most effective.
- ❖ Recognize there are many steps to building support and creating 100% smoke-free policies.
- ❖ Use a comprehensive approach that includes the provision of quitting services for employees and encouragement to quit as part of the plan for creating more smoke-free space.
- ❖ With a "chip away" strategy that builds on incremental changes to move toward a completely smoke-free environment, it is important to collaborate with casino management, tribal leaders, and gaming commissioners as part of the change process.

Type of Change:	Worksite (casino) Policy
Location of Change:	White Earth Reservation
Reach of Change:	Employers, employees, & customers
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