



Smoke-free Workplace Myths

1. Smoking bans are bad for business putting many restaurants and bars at risk for closure.

We do not want to put restaurants and bars out of business. We want to put cancer out of business. There are a number of independent, objective and peer-reviewed studies of smoke-free restaurant laws around the country that show there is no long-term negative impact on restaurant sales or employment from these laws.

In fact a new report released by New York City found that business tax receipts for restaurants and bars increased 8.7 percent from April 2003 to January 2004 compared to the same period in 2002 – 2003.¹ Instead of establishments closing and people out of work, employment in New York restaurants and bars increased after the implementation of the smoke-free law. In fact, 10,000 more jobs have been created.

Smoke-free laws also decrease business-related expenses by reducing non-smoking employee absenteeism, housekeeping and maintenance costs. At the same time smoke-free policies lower insurance rates and result in fewer smoking-related fires.

On the other hand, smoke-filled workplaces are an expensive business. Smoking costs the economy almost \$158 billion every year in health-related costs, including an estimated \$80 billion in lost productivity and more than \$75 billion in personal medical expenditures.² The economic costs of smoking are estimated to be about \$1,300 per smoking employee every year.³

Ultimately, smoke-free workplace laws are a win-win both for businesses, their employees, and patrons.

2. People can choose to work elsewhere if cigarette smoke bothers them.

No one should have to choose between their health and their paycheck.

Not every restaurant and bar worker has multiple options for employment. But what every worker should have is the right to breathe clean air wherever they work. Smoke-free workplaces are about employees spending 8 – 10 hours every day in a toxic environment.

3. People can choose to patronize already non-smoking establishments if they don't like the smoke.

Smoke-free laws are about creating an equal playing field among businesses and protecting the health of everyone not just customers. Currently, there are more white collar jobs protected by smoke-free workplace laws than blue collar jobs. Why should the type of job you have jeopardize your standard of health?

The general health of our community improves, health care costs decrease, nonsmoking employees take off less time from work due to sickness, and companies have lower housekeeping and insurance rates when everyone has the opportunity to breathe clean air.

4. Smoking bans take away an individual's right to smoke.

You have a right to smoke but you don't have a right to poison others. Smoking bans protect the health and welfare of every worker whether they smoke or not. Furthermore, smoke-free laws help the seven out of every ten smokers who want to quit smoking by providing environments free of the temptation to smoke.

5. Nonsmoking sections and ventilation systems reduce people's exposure to cigarette smoke.

Smoke knows no bounds. It's like having a no-peeing section of a pool. Nonsmoking sections and ventilation systems do not eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. In fact research has shown that even with advances in technology not all toxic substances from secondhand smoke can be removed from the air.

In fact, just recently, in commentary to a study published in the *British Medical Journal* on secondhand smoke, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sent out an advisory stating that as little as 30 minutes' exposure can have a serious and possibly deadly effect on people with heart problems.⁴

6. Restricting smoking in restaurants will protect the non-smoking patrons and workers.

Restricting smoking at certain times creates a false compromise because smoke lingers and there are no protections for workers at other times. All workers, no matter when they work, deserve a healthy environment and the opportunity to breathe clean air.

Smoke-free policies protect our most vulnerable citizens as well. The elderly, children, and people with certain health conditions can enjoy dining out without putting their health at risk.

7. There is no public support for smoke-free workplace policies.

A broad based, solid majority of voters across the political spectrum support smoke-free policies. Most recently polls in New York showed residents overwhelmingly support the statewide law.⁵

Bipartisan support is gaining momentum in the states as the tide is turning for smoke-free communities. Five states (California, Connecticut, Maine, New York and Delaware) have comprehensive smoke-free policies while Idaho, Florida, Oklahoma, Utah, South Dakota, and Vermont have laws that cover restaurants. Currently, more than 1,700 communities have enacted smoke-free workplace legislation for healthier employees and patrons.⁶

8. Secondhand smoke does not kill and is not harmful to nonsmokers' health.

Secondhand smoke is a health hazard. It causes 35,000 coronary heart disease deaths each year and 12,000 lives are lost to various forms of cancer, including 3,000 from lung cancer alone.⁷ It is the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States.

We also know that secondhand smoke contains more than 50 known or probable carcinogens and more than 4,000 chemicals.^{8,9} For example, arsenic can cause lung cancer, formaldehyde can cause nasal cancer, vinyl chloride can cause liver and brain cancer, and lead can cause liver cancer.

To say that secondhand smoke is not hazardous to one's health is just untrue. Real science backs up what common sense tell us. Every worker, including employees in restaurants and bars, has the right to protect their health, and breathe clean air.

¹ New York City Department of Finance, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Small Business Services, and Economic Development Corporation. "The State of Smoke-free New York City: A One-Year Review." March 2002; 1.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; *MMWR*. Annual smoking – attributable mortality, years of potential life lost, and economic costs – United States, 1995 – 1999 (PDF). *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2002; 51:300 – 303.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1996). Making Your Workplace Smokefree: A Decision Maker's Guide.

⁴ Babb, Stephen, and Pechacek, Terry F. (2004). How acute and reversible are the cardiovascular risks of secondhand smoke? *British Medical Journal*, 328:980 – 983 (24 April).

⁵ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (2004). NYC Smoke-free Law Tracking Poll. Obtained online 19 May 2004 at <http://tobaccofreekids.org/script/DisplayPressRelease.php3?Display=736>.

⁶ American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation. (2004). Overview List – How many Local Smokefree Laws? Obtained online 06 April 2004 at <http://www.no-smoke.org/mediaordlist.pdf>

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Annual smoking – attributable mortality, years of potential life lost, and economic costs – United States, 1995 – 1999 (PDF). *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2002; 51(14): 300-303.

⁸ National Cancer Institute. *Health Effects of Exposure to Environment Tobacco Smoke*. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 10 (PDF). Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute; 1999. NIH Pub. No. 99-4645.

⁹ National Toxicology Program. *10th Report on Carcinogens*. Research Triangle Park, NC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health service, National Toxicology Program, December 2002.