

Smokefree Policies in the Workplace

Workplaces nationwide are going smoke free both as states and local communities pass laws prohibiting smoking in workplaces and businesses do so voluntarily to protect employees and the general public from the proven harmful effects of secondhand smoke. Currently, 22 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have passed laws prohibiting smoking in almost all public places and workplaces, including restaurants and bars; a dramatic increase from just five years ago when only two states had such laws.

What are the effects of secondhand smoke on employees?

Secondhand smoke causes approximately 3,400 lung cancer deaths annually, as well as exacerbation of lung disease in nonsmoking adults and respiratory problems in children. Secondhand smoke also causes 46,000 (range of 22,700-69,600) heart disease deaths in adult nonsmokers in the U.S. each year.

Restaurant employees are far less likely than other workers to be protected by smoke free workplace policies, more likely than other workers to have these policies violated where they do exist and are more likely to be exposed to high levels of secondhand smoke on the job.

A study found that people who were exposed to smoke in the workplace were 17 percent more likely to develop lung cancer than those who were not exposed.

Separating smokers from nonsmokers, cleaning the air and ventilating buildings cannot eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Smoke free workplace policies are the only effective way to eliminate exposure.

What are the effects of secondhand smoke on employers?

A 2005 study estimated the total cost of secondhand smoke exposure in the United States at \$10 billion annually, \$5 billion in direct medical costs, and \$5 billion in indirect costs such as lost productivity.

Workers have been awarded unemployment, disability and worker's compensation benefits for illness and loss of work due to exposure to secondhand smoke.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that \$4 billion to \$8 billion in building operations and maintenance costs would be saved if policies prohibiting smoking in workplaces were adopted nationwide.

In August 1997, President Clinton signed an executive order requiring federal buildings controlled by the executive branch to prohibit smoking although separately enclosed, separately ventilated smoking rooms were allowed to be established.

What are the benefits of smoke free workplace laws/policies?

The 2006 Surgeon General's report on secondhand smoke concluded that: "workplace smoking restrictions lead to less smoking among covered workers." This helps to reduce the overall costs to employers while protecting employees from secondhand smoke. A 2005 study found that since New York's state smoke free workplace law went into effect in July 2003, bar and restaurant workers are suffering fewer sore throats, runny noses and irritated eyes. Also, continued levels in study participants declined by 78 percent within the first year after the law went into effect.

What are state and federal laws regarding smoking in workplaces?

Currently, 22 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have passed laws prohibiting smoking in most public places and workplaces, including restaurants and bars. In addition, hundreds of communities have passed local smoke free workplace laws.

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