



SMOKEFREE LAWS: KEY MESSAGES¹

"The key question to ask in developing an effective message is not "What do we want to say?" but "What must we say to empower our target audience to act?"

– *Enacting Strong Smoke-free Laws: The Advocate's Guide to Legislative Strategies, American Cancer Society/UICC Tobacco Control Strategy Planning Guide #3 (2006).*

Every smokefree air campaign must develop and consistently promote messages that will inform and inspire target audiences to take action to pass and implement comprehensive smokefree laws. According to experienced campaigners:

*"You must be clear about the message that you want to get across in all speeches you make or media you produce... A successful campaign never moves off its message. Do not get diverted by other issues, especially by opposition attacks."*²

The language a campaign chooses is critical. It takes just a few words to frame an issue, but those few words often determine how effectively the campaign is able to draw popular or political support.³

Successful Campaigns Focus on Core Messages⁴

Through hundreds of campaigns in a number of countries, several core messages have proven consistently effective:

- **"Secondhand smoke is a proven health hazard, not just a nuisance."** This message frames the campaign in terms of public health, not convenience or manners. In some countries, educating the public on the proven harms of secondhand smoke will require considerable work; in other countries, public understanding already exists.
- **"Everyone has the right to breathe clean air, free from the proven dangers of secondhand smoke. No one should have to risk their health in order to earn a paycheck or enjoy a night out in a restaurant or bar."** This frames the campaign in terms of basic rights and fair treatment of workers and the public.
- **"The only effective way to protect people is to provide 100% smokefree air. Designated smoking rooms and similar approaches do not work."** This message focuses on the solution that will work, and rejects ineffective alternatives promoted by the tobacco industry and its allies.
- **"Smokefree air laws work. They are popular, effective, good for the business, and compliance rates are very high. That is why they are spreading so quickly worldwide."** This message emphasizes that there is now extensive experience with smokefree laws around the world, and the results are overwhelmingly positive.

These messages are all evidence-based and form the basis of communications in most smokefree air campaigns. They can be stated in different ways to reach different audiences. The effectiveness of these messages has been studied primarily in developed countries.⁵ These

messages may be carefully adapted for use in different languages and cultures. However, it is important to consider differences between jurisdictions, and not to assume that these messages will work well everywhere.

Developing Tailored Messages for Specialized Audiences

In addition to core messages, specialized or “tailored” messages are essential to win the support of key audiences. Tailored messages address the special concerns of a particular target audience. Tailored messages are more dependent on the specific circumstances of each campaign. Examples of key audiences include:

- **Parliamentarians and other elected officials.** Most campaigns must convince elected politicians to support smokefree air legislation. Politicians must be assured that supporting legislation is the right thing to do as a matter of policy and politics. Polls showing strong support for the law among the politician’s own constituents can be especially persuasive and are an example of delivering a tailored message.
- **The hospitality industry.** In many countries, many owners of restaurants, bars, pubs and casinos believe misinformation from the tobacco industry about the impact of smokefree air laws. Smokefree law advocates may be able to win the support of some members of the hospitality sector by showing how smokefree laws have benefitted the hospitality sector in similar jurisdictions. Having these messages delivered by hospitality sector leaders from jurisdictions that have gone smokefree can be especially helpful in gaining the attention and trust of members of the hospitality sector.
- **Employers.** Employers need to know that smokefree laws are good for business. Most employers will support smokefree laws once they understand that the laws are widely respected, popular with employees, and that employers will see significant benefits such as higher worker productivity, lower health care costs, lower cleaning and ventilation costs, reduced fire risk, and fewer days of lost work due to illnesses caused by secondhand smoke.
- **Unions.** Unions may be especially responsive to hearing from leaders of unions in smokefree jurisdictions about how successful and popular smokefree laws have been with union members in their jurisdictions.
- **Religious leaders.** All major religions call upon people to avoid health hazards and religious leaders are often strong supporters of smokefree laws. In some countries, messages in support of smokefree laws from religious leaders may be effective and appropriate. However, this is an area that should be approached with caution, guided by religious tradition and national custom.

The Importance of Testing Messages

Campaign experts have learned that even with familiar issues such as smokefree air laws, it is important to test messages to make sure that they will have the desired impact on a specific target audience. When funding allows, experts may be hired to test messages on randomly selected members of the target audience through focus groups and surveys. If funding does not allow for such systematic testing, it is still important to “try out” messages on colleagues or contacts who are members of the targeted group. Advocates are often surprised at how much they can learn about how their target audience thinks and talks about this issue, and what specific words and messages will be most persuasive.

Resources for More Information on Developing and Using Effective Messages

Enacting Strong Smoke-free Laws: The Advocate's Guide to Legislative Strategies, American Cancer Society/UICC Tobacco Control Strategy Planning Guide #3 (2006), available at: http://strategyguides.globalink.org/main_guides.htm.

Smoke Signals, the original ACS/UICC media guide, available at: <http://www.strategyguides.globalink.org/guide10.htm>.

Now Hear This: The Nine Laws of Successful Advocacy Communications: useful lessons from some of the leading practitioners of public interest communications, available at: http://www.fenton.com/pages/5_resources/pdf/Packard_Brochure.pdf.

¹ This factsheet is adapted from: *Enacting Strong Smoke-free Laws: The Advocate's Guide to Legislative Strategies*, American Cancer Society/UICC Tobacco Control Strategy Planning Guide #3 (2006), available at: http://strategyguides.globalink.org/main_guides.htm

² The United Nations, *Millennium Campaign: Voices Against Poverty, The Millennium Development Goals Campaigning Toolkit*.

³ Dorfman, L, Wallack, L, and Woodruff, K, "More than a message: Framing public health advocacy to change corporate practices. *Health Education and Behavior* 32, 3 (2005); 320-326.

⁴ For more detailed factual information about each of the messages below, please see: Smokefree Air: The Essential Facts. Global Smokefree Partnership and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (2007). Available online at: http://www.tobaccofreecenter.org/files/pdfs/SF_facts.pdf

⁵ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (2007). Voters Across the Country Express Strong Support for Smoke-Free Laws. Data based on Nationwide survey of 1,000 voters conducted by The Mellman Group, Inc in January 2006. See, also Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (2007). Voters Across the Country Express Strong Support for Smoke-Free Laws. Available online at: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0290.pdf>. Accessed on 11.13.2007