

SMOKEFREE MYTHS AND REALITIES

For decades, the tobacco industry has promoted the myth that comprehensive smokefree laws are unnecessary and burdensome, will devastate economies, infringe on personal freedoms, and bankrupt businesses. The tobacco industry and its allies stand virtually alone in denying the negative health effects of secondhand smoke. To combat the myths created and supported by the tobacco companies and their allies, advocates need to be armed with the facts about smokefree policies.

Myth: "Secondhand smoke is not harmful to health."

Facts: Every scientific body in the world, including the World Health Organization, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have reached the same conclusion: secondhand smoke is a serious health threat and a significant cause of disease and death.^{1,2,3}

The U.S. Surgeon General's 2006 Report on the Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke found secondhand smoke exposure causes disease and premature death in children and adults who do not smoke. The report concluded that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.⁴

Studies that do not show a correlation between secondhand smoke and disease are typically funded by the tobacco industry.⁵ The tobacco companies have paid scientific consultants in every region of the world to attack the scientific evidence that secondhand smoke harms health.⁶

Myth: "Legislation is not needed. A voluntary policy will work instead."

Facts: Tobacco companies promote voluntary policies ahead of legislation because voluntary policies do not work. Only simple, clear, enforceable, and comprehensive legislation will ensure smokefree air to employees and the public.⁷ The tobacco industry funds schemes such as "Courtesy of Choice," which urge businesses to allow smoking in their establishments.⁸

In the UK, after more than five years of a voluntary code, the majority of bars did not comply with the scheme. Overall, fewer than 1 percent of all bars were smokefree, and the majority of restaurants permitted smoking.⁹ The UK is now 100% smoke-free.

Myth: "Smokefree laws are unpopular. Most people don't want them."

Facts: The opposite is true. These policies are extremely popular, and they become even more popular after the law comes into force. In Northern Ireland, 91 percent of respondents supported the introduction of comprehensive smokefree legislation.¹⁰ In New Zealand, support for smokefree bars, pubs, and nightclubs rose from 61 percent of adults in 2004 to 82 percent in 2006.¹¹

Four months after Ireland implemented its workplace smoking ban, 95 percent of the population believed the measure was a positive health measure.¹²

Six years after California extended its smokefree workplace law to cover all restaurants and bars, public support for the measure stood at 90 percent.¹³

Myth: "Smokefree laws violate an individual's right to smoke."

Facts: The right of a person to breathe clean air takes precedence over any possible right of smokers to pollute the air other people breathe. This is not about whether smokers smoke; it is about *where* they smoke.

Myth: *"Businesses have a right to allow smoking."*

Facts: The safety of workers and the public is not a matter of choice for business owners. Businesses cannot choose to opt out of food hygiene standards, or other health and safety requirements for workers and the public.

Myth: *"Smoking restrictions will ruin the economy."*

Facts: Despite the tobacco industry's dire predictions, numerous independent studies have shown that smokefree laws do not have a negative economic impact on the hospitality or tourism industries. In fact, in several jurisdictions, including New York City, smokefree laws have been followed by increased profits for the hospitality industry.^{14,15,16,17}

A comprehensive review of all available studies concluded that: "All of the best designed studies report no impact or a positive impact of smokefree restaurant and bar laws on sales or employment. Policymakers can act to protect workers and patrons from the toxins in secondhand smoke confident in rejecting industry claims that there will be an adverse economic impact."¹⁸

Myth: *"Smokefree laws will result in more smokers smoking in their homes and will expose more children to the dangers of secondhand smoke."*

Facts: International evidence suggests that smokefree laws reduce children's exposure to secondhand smoke.

Smokefree laws encourage adults to quit.¹⁹ When fewer adults smoke, children's exposure to secondhand smoke is reduced.²⁰ Smokefree laws also encourage people to adopt smokefree homes voluntarily.^{21,22}

After smokefree workplaces were introduced in Australia, the proportion of family homes with smoking restrictions nearly doubled.²³ Similar results were found in the US.²⁴

Myth: *"Smoking restrictions are not appropriate for our country."*

Facts: More than 200 million people worldwide are protected by 100 percent smokefree laws. These countries, states, and cities are large and small and represent many cultures. It is appropriate to protect all people from death and illness caused by secondhand smoke, no matter what country they live in.²⁵ No one is immune to the health risks from secondhand smoke.

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