

Support It!

The work environment can provide needed support for employees who want to quit tobacco, making the tough quitting journey a bit easier. On the other hand, ignoring smoking at work can inadvertently encourage nicotine addiction, make it tougher to quit, and expose all employees to the deadly toxins in cigarette smoke.

Consider your workplace policies. Do your smoking rules, policies and practices align with your mission? Do you encourage or deter tobacco use? Who in your workplace and community can help you champion tobacco policy changes that bolster worker health, safety, and productivity? What barriers do you face?

Former smokers say they value support from co-workers during the arduous process of quitting tobacco. To provide a workplace that supports quitting, consider these actions:

1. Protect employee health with a tobacco-free workplace
2. Identify and address barriers to quitting
3. Support quit attempts

Protect employee health with a tobacco-free workplace

“There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Tobacco smoke is deadly.”

— Dr. Richard H. Carmona,
U.S. Surgeon General’s Report, July 2006

Whether inhaled through a cigarette or by way of someone else’s, tobacco smoke is a Group 1 carcinogen, known to cause cancer in humans.⁵³ Some labor agreements require employers to provide smoking areas at the workplace. But workers have **no fundamental right to smoke**.⁵⁴

In fact, employers who allow smoking could face liability for exposing employees to a cancer-causing substance at work. Northwest Airline flight attendants, for instance, brought a class-action lawsuit after being exposed to second-hand smoke on flights to Asia, more than a decade after the 1988 smoking ban on US domestic flights.⁵⁵

Businesses are discovering that employee tobacco use at work is a bottom-line issue:

- Secondhand smoke in the U.S. costs \$9.6 billion a year: \$5 billion in medical costs and \$4.6 billion in lost wages.⁵⁶
- Construction and maintenance cost 7 percent more in buildings that allow smoking than those that are smoke-free.⁵⁷
- Smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths in the United States. Between 1999 and 2002, non-home fires caused by smoking cost an average of 10,000 lives and \$153 million in property damage per year.⁵⁸ Fire insurance is commonly reduced 25-30% in smoke-free businesses.⁵⁹

Not surprisingly, restrictions reduce employee smoking. The tobacco industry has done the math on workplace smoking bans: “Smokers facing these restrictions,” says an internal Phillip

Morris memo, “consume 11 percent to 15 percent less than average and quit at a rate that is 84 percent higher than average.”⁶⁰

Involve and inform employees

Open communication between employees and management will broaden support for your new tobacco-use policy. Allow ample time for employees to discuss proposed changes, expected outcomes, and concerns.

Early in the process of implementing your tobacco policy change, form a working group. Include senior management, human resources staff, safety officers, union and occupational health representatives, and other interested employees. The working group can consider workplace culture and local laws to determine ways to effectively implement and monitor the new policy.

Focused group discussions or surveys can help you better understand the impact of tobacco on your workforce: How many employees smoke or chew tobacco and why? How do smokers and nonsmokers feel about the current tobacco-use policy and the changes you propose? Do tobacco users want to quit? Do they know ways to make the quitting journey easier? Find out from tobacco users the barriers to quitting tobacco and what could help motivate them to quit.

McCain Foods, a food processing company, gave employees plenty of notice before banning tobacco in 2005 on its Othello, Washington campus. Employees of the mid-sized operation met monthly with the company nurse and a county health official to design a tobacco-cessation program. They designed a program that included free cessation aids, peer counselors, and premium incentives for nonsmokers.

Sample surveys and discussion guides are found in Resources D, E and F.

Support quit attempts

Many companies support employees trying to quit. Companies, small or large, can create an atmosphere where employees can feel supported as they break their addiction to tobacco.

Throughout the worksite, Medtronic provides hard candy, mints and toothpicks that smokers can pop in their mouths, in place of a cigarette.

Union Pacific provides coaches for people who are trying to quit. Former smokers can play this role. Smokers say they prefer the support of former smokers who can relate to their addiction; they resent being “lectured” by people who have never smoked.

Slumberland, headquartered in New Canada, Minn., has provided workshops on becoming tobacco-free, and rewards employees who attend—whether or not they smoke. This encourages everyone to learn more about tobacco, and also helps reduce any stigma associated with attending the sessions.

Establish a comprehensive tobacco use policy

Creating a tobacco-free workplace can take anywhere from six to eighteen months, depending upon the complexity and culture of your organization and the smoke-free laws in your community.

If you plan to introduce a new tobacco-use policy, begin with an understanding of your tobacco-cessation resources, the smoke-free laws and ordinances in your region, and the potential impact on your workforce. Clearly establish your intention to become tobacco-free and the rationale behind this decision. Then, with visible support from top management, develop a process that engages employees at all levels and supports tobacco users to quit.

Craft a clear policy with accountability and periodic reviews. Effective policies include:

- Purpose of the policy
- Products covered under the policy (i.e. Does policy apply to smokeless tobacco?)
- Definition of how policy applies to employees, visitors, others
- Physical boundaries of policy (e.g. private vehicles, company equipment, etc.)
- Support to help employees comply, including cessation services
- Clear enforcement rules and consequences
- Contact person who can answer questions and address concerns
- Policy review process

Find examples of tobacco-use policies in Resource K.

Smokeless tobacco harms health

Snuff, chew, or spit tobacco cause addiction and disease. When designing a tobacco-use policy for your organization, consider including smokeless products:

- Nicotine in smokeless tobacco is absorbed 3-4 times the rate of nicotine in cigarettes
- Smokeless tobacco contains 28 carcinogens
- Spit tobacco products cause gum disease, tooth decay, cancer of the oral cavity and pharynx, and pregnancy-related problems

As companies, localities and states ban smoking, the tobacco industry seeks to expand the use of smokeless tobacco through aggressive marketing and new products. Develop policies that demonstrate your concern for employee health.

Source: National Cancer Institute, US National Institutes of Health. Smokeless Tobacco & Cancer: Questions & Answers. <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Tobacco/smokeless#top> Accessed Sept. 16, 2008.

10 steps to becoming tobacco-free

1. Establish a leadership group and commitment to a tobacco-free workplace. Assign a senior manager to implement the new policy.
2. Engage employees, including smokers, nonsmokers, and former smokers. Be sure to include representatives from different departments and recognized employee organizations (e.g. union, safety committee).
3. Gather information:
 - Legal, medical and economic background
 - Employee tobacco use, concerns about new policy, barriers to quitting
 - Examples of policies
 - Organizational complexities (i.e. ownership of building, labor contracts)
4. Create a change plan and implementation timetable with preparation steps, the announcement date, interim steps, and opportunities to review the policy and process.
5. Chief executive officer announces the policy to all employees in a meeting and letter.
6. Communicate often. Inform and educate employees using manager trainings, employee feedback, company newsletter, paycheck inserts, letters to families.
7. Transform your environment by removing ashtrays and cigarette vending machines and installing “No Smoking” signs in prominent places. (Include these steps in the timeline.)
8. Provide and promote effective cessation treatment, including counseling and medications at little or no cost.
9. Support smokers and tobacco users who want to quit, understanding that quitting is a process that can take multiple attempts with a variety of strategies.
10. Evaluate and refine your policy.

For more information on developing a tobacco-free workplace with an example of a detailed 12-month timeline and sample workplace policies, visit Smokefree in a Box at <http://www.globalsmokefree.com>