

Support for Smoke-free Legislation in Mississippi

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Breathing clean air is fundamental to good health and often taken for granted. We all want to live and work in a pollution-free environment and have every opportunity for a long and healthful life. We want our children to have every opportunity to grow up free of disease. We would never want to see a child running in a park filled with a thick layer of factory pollution. However, we all experience potentially toxic levels of pollution every time we are exposed to secondhand smoke, whether it's in a workplace, restaurant or other public place.

Secondhand smoke exposes us, willingly or not, to carcinogens that can cause cancer and other health-related problems. It contains more than 4,000 chemical compounds, and over 40 of these are known carcinogens. According to the California EPA, secondhand tobacco smoke is in the same category as the most toxic automotive and industrial air pollutants.

“The scientific evidence is now indisputable: secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance. It is a serious health hazard that can lead to disease and premature death in children and nonsmoking adults... We know that secondhand smoke harms people’s health, but many people assume that exposure to secondhand smoke in small doses does not do any significant damage to one’s health. However, science has proven that there is NO risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke.”
-Surgeon General Carmona, June 27, 2006

As of January 4, 2009, 27 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have enacted comprehensive smoke-free laws for restaurants, and 22 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have enacted comprehensive smoke-free laws for bars. In addition to the states with comprehensive smoke-free laws, 331 communities have a comprehensive smoke-free ordinance that prohibits smoking in workplaces, restaurants, and bars. Currently, over two-thirds (70.2%) of the U.S. population lives in a state or a community that has a comprehensive smoke-free law, and most of the southeastern states have enacted statewide smoke-free laws.

Yet, only 9.53% of Mississippians are protected by law from secondhand smoke. Mississippi has not passed any statewide legislation that would apply to indoor work areas, restaurants or bars. That’s like giving a face mask to just 1 out of every 10 children playing in the aforementioned pollution-filled park.

Mississippi: Running behind and out of breath?

Despite a lack of resources when compared to many states, Mississippians strive hard to get ahead. Comprehensive smoke-free laws are one economical way our state can clean up its air and move to the front of the pack. Smoke-free laws protect citizens from exposure to air pollution in public places (e.g., workplaces, restaurants, bars) caused by secondhand smoke and thereby promote a healthier population.

Smoke-free Communities in Mississippi

In Mississippi, 24 communities have enacted strong smoke-free ordinances. The following communities have enacted comprehensive smoke-free laws for all indoor public places, including restaurants and bars.

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|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. Aberdeen | 7. Flora | 13. Laurel | 19. Pontotoc |
| 2. Amory | 8. Greenwood | 14. Mantachie | 20. Ridgeland |
| 3. Clinton | 9. Grenada | 15. Metcalfe | 21. Starkville |
| 4. Collins | 10. Hattiesburg | 16. Mayersville | 22. Summit |
| 5. Corinth | 11. Hernando | 17. Oxford | 23. Tupelo |
| 6. Ecu | 12. Kosciusko | 18. Petal | 24. West |

Brookhaven, McComb, Greenville, Picayune, Walls, and Gulfport have passed smoke-free ordinances that include significant exemptions. Jackson recently passed an ordinance that exempts restaurants that serve alcohol where food receipts make up 25 percent or less of gross sales.

The best-designed economic impact studies demonstrate that smoke-free legislation has had no negative impact on sales tax revenue and employment in the hospitality industry. Furthermore, it has had a positive impact in some places (Scollo, Lal, Hyland, & Glantz, 2003). Studies that have detected negative impacts have been shown to be scientifically flawed. They did not include adjustments for economic conditions and/or relied on subjective measures rather than objective, economic indicators. The Starkville Smoke-free Ordinance was enacted on May 20, 2006. Local sales tax data demonstrate that the restaurant industry has continued to grow in the months that followed.

The only means of effectively eliminating health risks associated with indoor exposure is to ban smoking activity... No other engineering approaches, including current and advanced dilution ventilation or air cleaning technologies, have demonstrated or should be relied upon to control health risks from [Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS)] exposure in spaces where smoking occurs. -American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air Conditioning Engineers, June 2005

Strong Public Support for Smoke-Free Legislation

It's surprising that Mississippi hasn't passed comprehensive smoke-free legislation given the broad public support it receives. The Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Control, administered by the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University, demonstrated the following:

- **Just over 81% of Mississippi adults believe restaurants should be completely smoke-free**
- **76% believe that indoor work areas should be completely smoke-free**

Results from the Social Climate Survey also revealed that smoke-free public places have substantial bipartisan support among Mississippi adults. The majority of both Republicans and Democrats stated that these public places should be smoke-free.

Conclusion

Secondhand smoke is a form of air pollution. A growing number of states and communities across the nation are adopting comprehensive smoke-free legislation to protect citizens. Currently Mississippi has no such legislation, despite broad public support. As would be expected with other forms of pollution, the majority of Mississippi citizens want to be protected from secondhand smoke.

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