

Smoke-Free Workplace Law: 5 Years

Law leads to a healthier Commonwealth

The Massachusetts Smoke-Free Workplace Law went into effect on July 5, 2004. The law requires restaurants, bars, and all other workplaces in the Commonwealth to be free from tobacco smoke. Skeptics feared that the law would hurt business, be impossible to enforce, and would have no lasting impact. Five years later, it is clear that these fears were unfounded.

- A study conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Harvard School of Public Health showed that after the Massachusetts Smoke-Free Workplace Law was implemented, the Commonwealth had 577 fewer heart attack deaths annually than expected.
- An independent observational study conducted in 2008 found 94% compliance with the smoking provisions of the Smoke-Free Workplace Law. Out of 400 locations that were inspected, only 2 were found to have active smoking.
- According to the 2007 BRFSS, only 5.2% of Massachusetts adults reported seeing smoking in indoor workplaces. This is consistent with the 94% compliance found in the observational study.
- A 2005 report by the Harvard School of Public Health demonstrated “that the state-wide Massachusetts law has effectively improved indoor air quality in a sample of Massachusetts venues and has not negatively impacted leisure and hospitality revenue and employment in Massachusetts.”

While the law has been overwhelmingly successful, certain problems still remain. A large portion of calls to the secondhand smoke complaint and information line are now in regards to secondhand smoke exposure in multi-unit dwellings like apartment buildings, which are not covered by the law. While their parents are protected from secondhand smoke exposure in the workplace, an estimated 250,000 children are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke at home.

Communities are working to close loopholes in the law, which provided for certain exceptions, including smoking bars, private clubs, and outdoor patios adjacent to restaurants. As of June 1, 2009, 105 communities have enacted regulations that are stronger than the Smoke-Free Workplace Law. These local regulations include prohibiting smoking in nursing homes, hotels, private clubs, smoking bars and outdoor areas including playgrounds and beaches frequented by families.



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Make smoking history.