

Restaurant Survey:

An Investigation of Smoking Policies among Davidson County Eating Establishments

INTRODUCTION

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death and disability in the United States according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The Surgeon General has concluded that tobacco smoke causes cancer and is an important risk factor in heart disease. Ample research has shown that smoking and Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) is dangerous. The health risks from inhaling tobacco smoke are not limited to the smoker but also include those who inhale ETS. Non-smokers exposed to ETS are at risk for lung cancer and heart disease. Exposure to ETS has been associated with cervical cancer, stroke and low birth-weight babies (cited from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)).

The EPA estimates that ETS causes about 53,000 deaths a year: 37,000 from heart disease; 3,700 from lung cancer and 12,000 from other cancers. The EPA has classified ETS as a Class A Carcinogen. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), recommends that workers should not be exposed involuntarily to tobacco smoke and that tobacco smoke be eliminated from the workplace.

With the consideration that ETS is harmful and should not be inhaled, there are other beneficial factors to consider when eliminating ETS. According to the Office on Smoking and Health, instituting smoke-free work environments can reduce costs for cleaning and maintaining facilities/equipment and improve employee morale.

There is a growing concern that patrons and employees of restaurants and bars may be exposed to high levels of ETS. Among restaurant employees, this exposure has been linked to increased risk of lung cancer.^{1,2}

As of August 1996, 191 cities, towns, and counties had enacted ordinances regarding smoke-free restaurants.³ In opposition to these ordinances, the restaurant and tobacco industries have argued that smoke-free policies will result in economic hardship.⁴

Several studies conducted with restaurateurs have found that the primary reasons cited for not implementing smoke-free policies included fear of losing business, laying off employees and difficulty with enforcing smoke-free policies.⁵⁻⁸

However, research has demonstrated that smoke-free restaurants have not experienced economic losses. A Flagstaff, Arizona study conducted in 1997 compared restaurant sales before and after the “enactment of the no-smoking ordinance.” The researchers found no evidence that prohibiting smoking in Flagstaff restaurants affected restaurant sales.⁹