

TOBACCO-FREE WORKPLACE POLICY

Working toward a best practice



As an employer/organization working to strengthen its workplace wellness initiative, it is important to recognize that tobacco use remains among the leading causes of preventable disease and death in Minnesota. The adoption of documented policies, such as a tobacco-free workplace policy, should be a key component to a wellness initiative.

Workplace wellness initiatives should create a *culture of health* at the workplace to engage employees in making healthy choices. Quitting tobacco use is one of those healthy choices.

Health rationale

The health dangers of smoking are long documented. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that compared with nonsmokers, smokers are at an increased risk of:

- Contracting coronary heart disease by 2 to 4 times^{1,2}
- Having a stroke by 2 to 4 times,^{1,3}
- Developing lung cancer by 23 times in men; 13 times in women¹
- Dying from chronic obstructive lung diseases (such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema) by 12 to 13 times.¹

Tobacco-free advocacy

In support of adopting a tobacco-free workplace policy, the American Cancer Society provides the following information in its Tobacco-Free Workplace Tool Kit:⁴

It turns out that more than 70 percent of adult smokers say they want to quit, but without help, fewer than five percent succeed. As an employer, you can benefit from assisting your employees with their efforts to quit tobacco; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the annual cost of tobacco use to an employer averages about \$3,400 per smoker per year.

Research shows that when employers implement a [tobacco]-free policy, smokers are more likely to quit smoking, which can help them stay well. In addition, a [tobacco]-free policy within your organization will send a clear message to employees and the community that you care about their health and safety.

Implementing a best practice policy

A best practice policy is comprehensive in nature – in that it applies to all work areas and workplace environments in order to best encourage and support employees in quitting tobacco. It should be included in an organization's standard, written policies and include the following components:

- Prohibits the use of any form of tobacco
- Applies to all owned and leased buildings and grounds, company vehicles at any time and personal vehicles while on company premises
- Has a set of enforcement protocols (any supervisor knows what to do in the event he/she witnesses an employee violating the policy)

New policies can face resistance. However, tobacco-free workplace policies offer significant long-term benefits to both employees and employers and should therefore be considered an *essential* component of any workplace wellness initiative. When promoting a new/updated tobacco-free workplace policy at least four months in advance, any employee trepidation is significantly reduced, plus it gives employees a head start to visit a health care provider, obtain quit medications and make quit attempts.

References

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General](#). Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2004 [accessed 2012 Jan 10].
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [Reducing the Health Consequences of Smoking: 25 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General](#). Rockville (MD): U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 1989 [accessed 2012 Jan 10].
3. Ockene IS, Miller NH. [Cigarette Smoking, Cardiovascular Disease, and Stroke: A Statement for Healthcare Professionals from the American Heart Association](#). [Circulation](#) 1997;96(9):3243–7 [accessed 2012 Jan 10].
4. American Cancer Society. [Tobacco-free Workplace Tool Kit](#), 2011 [accessed 2012 Jan 10].