



**Pan American
Health
Organization**

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Building Support for 100% Smoke-Free Environments in the Americas

Introduction

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in 2001 launched the Smoke Free Americas initiative to raise awareness about the harmful effect of exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke and to support efforts to implement 100% smoke-free environments in all public places and workplaces. The initiative provides information about strategies and progress in achieving smoke-free environments through the www.smokefreeamericas.org website, sponsors policy-relevant research, conducts training, and provides seed grants to support strategic smoke-free environment campaigns.

Why Smoke-Free Environments?

In identifying priorities for tobacco control, PAHO was seeking an issue that would receive support from countries, that was politically feasible, and that would effectively reduce tobacco use in the short term. Smoke-free environments (SFEs) were chosen as the focus of action for several reasons:

- SFEs are among the most effective ways to reduce tobacco use. They produce immediate health and economic gains by helping smokers quit and preventing non-smokers from starting, by reducing illness in non-smokers, and by increasing productivity. The most recent literature indicates that 100% smoke-free workplaces decrease consumption among smokers by nearly 30%.
- Protection of non-smokers is politically saleable and can generate political will. Smoke-free environments

provide a concrete, realistic goal for policy-makers that is achievable during their political cycle. Smoke-free environments can be implemented at all jurisdictional levels, from national to local. They provide opportunities for action at the municipal level at a time when municipalities have greater responsibility as a result of decentralization policies.

- SFEs generate support for a broader tobacco control agenda. Smoking restrictions send a powerful educational message and provide an activity around which to build community advocacy and empowerment. School campaigns can provide a training ground for student advocacy. Informing the public about the risks of second-hand smoke and providing people with tools to protect themselves promotes individual ownership of and responsibility for health.
- SFE campaigns provide opportunities for partnerships and inter-sectoral collaboration. Community campaigns, which inevitably require the support of a variety of organizations, including public and private partnerships, can promote collaboration on other issues of common concern to the community.
- Second-hand smoke exposure links to other highly visible agendas, such as maternal and child health. Workplace campaigns can raise the profile of other occupational health and safety issues and promote dialogue between employers and employees.

**100% smoke-free workplaces decrease
consumption among smokers by nearly 30%.**

- SFE campaigns use a variety of strategies, including education, institutional capacity building, legislation, and social marketing.

Furthermore, exposure to second-hand smoke on its own is a significant health problem in the Americas. Information from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey indicates that in many countries, there is significant exposure of youth to second-hand smoke in their homes and in public places. The highest levels of exposure in the home are in Havana, Cuba (69% of youth exposed), Buenos Aires, Argentina (68%), Montevideo, Uruguay (65%), Santiago, Chile (61%) and Suriname (57%) (see Figure 1 below).

What are the Challenges to Achieving 100% Smoke-Free Environments?

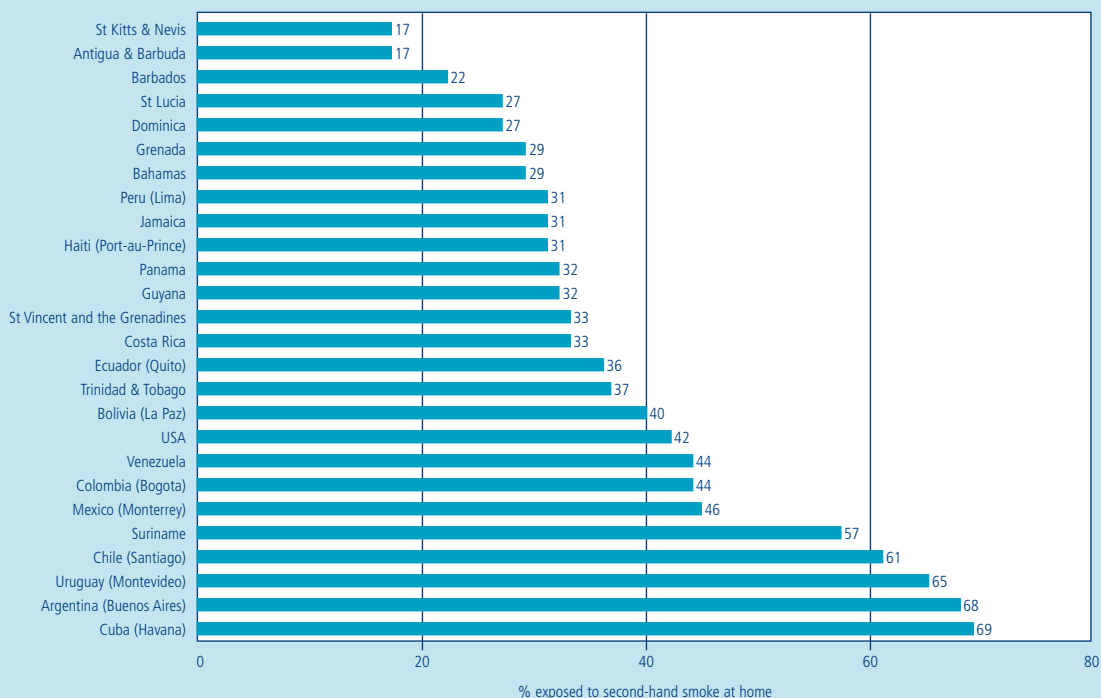
The tobacco industry. The tobacco industry is the biggest single obstacle to smoke-free environments. Tobacco companies dislike any measure that hurts the sales of tobacco products. As early as the 1980’s they estimated that in the USA, “At a dollar a pack even the lightest of workplaces smoking restrictions is

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costing this industry 233 million dollars a year in revenue.” Philip Morris re-expressed this fear in 1994: “The immediate implication [of smoking bans] for our business is clear: if our consumers have fewer opportunities to enjoy our products, they will use them less frequently and the result will be an adverse impact on our bottom line.”

To respond to the threat, as detailed in the PAHO study, *Profits Over People*, tobacco companies mounted a massive public relations campaign in Latin America and the Caribbean to convince the public and legislators that second-hand smoke was not a health hazard and that regulation was not required. They hired scientists to misrepresent the science, sponsored journalism conferences to promote their data, and lobbied governments to leave the issue alone. The campaign was successful, judging from the very slow progress on smoke-free environments in Latin America and the Caribbean throughout the 1990s.

Figure 1. Youth Exposure to Second-hand Smoke in the Home
Data from Global Youth Tobacco Survey, 1999-2002



Lack of awareness. There have traditionally been low levels of awareness about the health hazards caused by second-hand smoke, and about the importance of smoke-free environments in reducing tobacco use. Members of the public, health professionals, civil society and governments all needed to be educated to build support for the issue. Most tobacco control campaigns by NGOs and governments have focused on educating the public about the dangers of direct smoking rather than on second-hand smoke.

Even when there is awareness of harm caused by second-hand smoke, there is often lack of awareness of the appropriate solutions. Shared spaces and ventilation improvements are, of course, promoted by tobacco companies, and are often proposed and accepted as solutions despite their ineffectiveness.

Outdated laws and misperceptions of the law. As with initial laws restricting smoking in North America, most laws restricting smoking in Latin America and the Caribbean, if they exist at all, simply require that places set aside non-smoking areas. In most sectors, smoking areas are allowed, meaning that protection from second-hand smoke is very weak. This is true even in the health sector in many countries. The concept of 100% smoke-free environments remains novel.

Adding to the problem is a widely-held perception, even among strong advocates for smoke-free environments, that the laws are adequate but they just need to be enforced. In reality, the laws themselves are inadequate. What is needed are much stronger laws combined with public education and enforcement.

Limited infrastructure for tobacco control within civil society and government. As with other tobacco control efforts, progress toward smoke-free environments is limited by under-resourced governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOS). Many NGOs working in tobacco control do not have full-time staff persons. NGOs with more resources have not often chosen to dedicate their efforts to tobacco control. Similarly, governments in all but the largest countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, rarely have more than one person dedicated full-time to tobacco control, and in many cases do not even have one staff person dedicated full-time to the issue.

Smoke Free Americas Activities

Information development and dissemination, and public education. Although there is a wealth of information in English on all aspects of smoke-free environments, the quantity of information is overwhelming for someone unfamiliar with the issue. In addition, there is very little advocacy or economic information available in Spanish. In order to consolidate and expand on this information, PAHO developed the Smoke Free Americas website (www.smokefreeamericas.org and www.americalibredehumo.org). The website contains health and economic information, advocacy arguments, "how to" guides for going smoke-free, multi-media resources, and updates on progress in the region. The type of information ranges from basic information suitable for the general public, to detailed scientific reports more relevant to advocates and health professionals.

PAHO is also making a series of advertisements available as public service announcements to media outlets in Latin America and the Caribbean. The ads, which show the effects of second-hand smoke and the benefits of smoke-free environments, will support local campaign efforts to promote smoke-free policies.

Training and training tools. PAHO has developed the Smoke Free Americas Workshop to train communities to conduct campaigns for smoke free environments. Workshops were held in Jamaica, St. Lucia (including participants from St. Vincent and the Grenadines), Uruguay and Honduras in 2003. The workshop guide is also electronically available in English and Spanish for public use at the Smoke Free Americas website.

PAHO will continue to conduct the workshop in selected communities upon request, depending on available resources. However, the workshop can also be conducted by federal, state or municipal authorities and by non-governmental organizations. Its aim is to build strong communities across sectors

In shared smoking and non-smoking areas, some non-smoking areas have higher levels of smoke than smoking areas.

Who is 100% smoke-free? New York City, El Paso, California, Ottawa, Victoria, Norway, Ireland, and many more!

—governments, NGOs, and wider communities— that are ready to campaign for smoke free environments. It provides training in content-related knowledge as well as in the skills needed to conduct campaigns.

Policy-relevant research. In order to supply locally-relevant data to policy makers in the region, PAHO in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University has conducted a study of second-hand smoke levels in specific sectors in nine countries throughout the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay). The study is being expanded to other countries.

The available data shows that, in most countries, bars and restaurants have the highest levels of second-hand smoke. However, even some hospitals reported high concentrations, and smoke was present in many sectors where smoking is banned by law. The data also shows that some non-smoking areas had **higher** levels of smoke than smoking areas. This data should convince policy makers of the need for laws making workplaces 100% smoke-free, without smoking areas, and of the need for better enforcement of existing laws.

PAHO, in collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), also collects and disseminates survey data on youth behavior, knowledge and attitudes about second-hand smoke through the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (see data above).

Support for smoke-free communities. PAHO provides financial support to a handful of communities that are seen as ready to become 100% smoke-free in a wide variety of sectors. This support will encourage the setting of precedents in communities in Latin America and the Caribbean that will provide momentum for other communities in the region to follow.

Current and Expected Outcomes

The Smoke Free Americas campaign already appears to have been successful in raising awareness among civil society and governments about the need for smoke-free environments. Whereas many public health groups previously focused almost exclusively on smoking cessation and school education, many are now engaged in campaigns to raise awareness about second-hand smoke.

Governments have also begun to address the issue through strengthening of laws (for example, Brazil, Uruguay and the state of Monagas in Venezuela) and through voluntary programs to encourage smoke-free environments in the public and private sectors (for example, Chile and Costa Rica).

The recent adoption of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is expected to accelerate progress toward smoke-free environments as well as other tobacco control policies. The FCTC, an international treaty that will become binding international law for countries that ratify it, requires ratifying countries to adopt “effective legislative, executive, administrative and/or other measures, providing for protection from exposure to tobacco smoke in indoor workplaces, public transport, indoor public places and, as appropriate, other public places.”

As countries begin changing their laws to comply with this broad international mandate, it is hoped that all—and not just a select few— residents of the Americas will be able to exercise their right to clean, smoke-free air.

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For more information about Smoke Free Americas, please contact: tobacco@paho.org, or visit www.smokefreeamericas.org.