A breath of fresh air

Introducing a smoke-free policy at work

A total ban on smoking in enclosed public spaces and workplaces has been passed by Parliament and will become law soon. If you don't already have a smoke-free workplace, it'll take time to prepare your staff, customers and visitors for the change – so you need to start planning now.

Starting out

The best way to bring in a no-smoking policy that everyone respects is to involve your staff from the start. Set up a working party to look at how to introduce the policy and ask volunteers from different departments or areas of your organisation to take part. You'll get better feedback if:

- you include staff from all areas of your business (eg different buildings or processes, travelling workers, people who deal with the public)
- you include representatives of all levels, from shop-floor workers to directors
- you include a health and safety professional and/or a human resources officer
- you ask smokers and non-smokers to take part in the working party
- you put forward several different options for the working party to consider, taking into account the interests of smokers and non-smokers
- you run the new policy for a trial period at first, to identify and sort out any problems
- you give at least three months' notice before implementing the policy.

Workplace smoking – facts and figures

- 3 million workers in the UK are regularly exposed to second-hand tobacco smoke

- passive smoking is responsible for an estimated 1,000 deaths every year

- in 2003/04 around 600 deaths were caused by passive smoking at work – nearly three times the number killed by accidents

- exposure to second-hand smoke increases a non-smoker's chance of getting lung cancer or heart disease by 25 per cent

- around 50 per cent of workplaces are already smoke-free

- a workplace smoking ban will come into force on 26 March 2006 in Scotland and a similar ban is slated to start in England in summer 2007

Developing your policy

The working party should gather information from a wide range of sources before recommending a new policy. You'll need to:
- look at current smoking restrictions (if you have any) and how well they work
- consider changes in scientific advice, such as new evidence on the effects of passive smoking
- take changes in the law into account
- explore a variety of policy options
- canvass opinions of everyone affected, perhaps through questionnaires
- consider how the policy will affect visitors or customers.

If your employees work in people's homes (eg as healthcare workers or in social services), have a look at the advice on the Scottish Executive's 'Healthier Scotland' website.

The working party then needs to present senior managers with a range of options, ideally with their associated advantages and disadvantages. It's now up to senior management to agree the way forward and plan a timetable for the introduction of the policy.

Communicating your policy

Once you've agreed your policy, you need to communicate it efficiently and positively to everyone it affects. In clear, simple language, it should:
- explain why it's been developed – to help create a healthy, safe and comfortable environment
- acknowledge the right of employees to work in a smoke-free environment
- say who it applies to – just employees, or visitors and customers as well
- say where it applies – just in enclosed spaces or on the whole of your site
- identify the managers who are responsible for implementing and monitoring it
- say what will happen if someone doesn't obey it

- give the name of someone who can field questions or problems.

It's important to make sure the policy reaches everyone it's going to affect. You'll need to put 'no smoking' signs up in prominent places, especially in areas where people relax at break times and at points where visitors and customers can easily see them.

Some smokers may see a smoking ban as a way to help them quit the habit. You should encourage them as much as possible – offer them support within your organisation and give them information on resources available in the local community or on the internet.

Putting your policy into practice

You've created your policy, decided who's going to oversee and monitor it, publicised it (including 'no smoking' signs) and provided support for smokers who want to quit. Now you need to put it into practice. Give your employees plenty of notice – three months is recommended – and ensure everyone knows when the ban starts.

Once the policy is up and running, it's important to keep an eye on how effective it is. Are people obeying it? If people are still smoking, are you challenging them and offering further help, or are their managers 'turning a blind eye'? You may find you need to make minor adjustments to the policy to ensure everyone gets the maximum benefit out of it.

Some useful links

Action on Smoking and Health (www.ash.org.uk) – see Fact Sheet 25, *Workplace smoking policies: why employers should act*, and the 2005 report, *Smoking in the workplace*, www.ash.org.uk/html/ workplace/pdfs/workplace.pdf.

ACAS (www.acas.org.uk) – see *Smoking at work*, www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/n/9/ B11_1.pdf.

Avon NHS Trust 'Easy breathing' programme, www.easybreathing.avon.nhs. uk/workplace/default.htm.

Health and Safety Executive (www.hse.gov.uk) – see the 'smoking' page: www.hse.gov.uk/contact/faqs/smoking.htm.

Scottish Executive 'Healthier Scotland' programme, www.clearingtheairscotland. com/faqs/guidance.html (includes guidance on smoking policies for the NHS, local authorities and care service providers).

Smoke at Work (www.smokeatwork.org) – a joint union website funded by the EU with policy templates for different sectors of industry, www.smokeatwork.org/sector.htm.

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image: www.sxc.hu/lusi