EX® program
by Truth Initiative®

Tip Sheet

Tobacco-free Policies in the Workplace: Clear Answers for Tough Questions

So, your organization is thinking about doing away with smoking areas and going tobacco-free. **But you still have questions.**

Or you have a tobacco-free policy, but not everyone is adhering to it. **What do you do?**

This tip sheet gets into these nitty gritty considerations. *However, the information here is not legal advice. Be sure to consult with your legal counsel to identify specific requirements for your company.*

Why **employees need your help**

Smoking is still the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. Almost 51 million people use some form of tobacco, roughly 1 in 5 of all adults.

The costs of tobacco use are mind-blowing for employers. A company with 500 employees who smoke can expect to pay roughly more than $1 million yearly in tobacco-related healthcare costs. Nationwide, smoking-related illnesses in the U.S. cost more $300 billion annually.

By implementing a tobacco-free policy in combination with the right quit-tobacco program, you can help reduce these numbers and improve the quality of life for your employees.

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Benefits of **going tobacco-free**

In addition to reducing smoking rates among workers, tobacco-free policies do so much more.

The benefits of smoke-free policies in indoor public places, such as workplaces, also include:

Improved indoor air quality

Reduced secondhand smoke exposure

A shift in social norms about the acceptability of smoking

Prevention of smoking initiation by youth and young adults

Reduced heart attack and asthma hospitalizations among nonsmokers

Today, about 80% of indoor workers in the U.S. are covered by a 100% smoke-free policy. However, outdoor workers are often not covered by indoor smoke-free policies. And certain industries, such as farming, fishing, forestry, construction, and transportation, are less likely to have smoking policies in place at all.

If this sounds like your company, here is additional guidance on how to create a policy that will equally cover—and benefit—all employees.

Key **questions** and **answers**

1 How can my organization determine if it's ready to go tobacco-free?

Research shows smoking bans (no smoking allowed at all) are more effective than smoking restrictions (smoking allowed only in certain areas) in lowering exposure to secondhand smoke by an average of 72% in the workplace and in reducing the number of employees who smoke.

However, whether your company is ready to go tobacco-free depends on the setup of your property and the impact tobacco has on productivity and health. For example, if people would have to drive 15 minutes to get outside the grounds to smoke, you need to weigh the impact on productivity against the possible impact of providing designated smoking spots.

2 Should I treat e-cigarettes in the workplace differently than cigarettes?

It's helpful to review state laws in terms of specific regulations, but in general, there should not be any exceptions made to tobacco-free policies to allow the use of e-cigarettes.

> Are e-cigarettes good or bad? Download
> **"5 Things Employers Need to Know Now about E-cigarettes"**

3 Can I enforce no-smoking rules when employees aren't at work? Or simply not hire smokers?

Employers have less freedom to regulate off-duty smoking by employees, and several states have laws prohibiting discrimination against smokers. These laws prohibit employers from making hiring decisions based on employee conduct outside of work, as long as that conduct is legal.

However, these laws still allow worksites to enact policies that limit use of or exposure to tobacco products during the workday or on worksite property, even if state law allows it.

Today, employers in 21 states can legally discriminate against smokers, making it harder for them to be hired and to receive access to benefits that can help them quit. But for employers committed to addressing social determinants of health, social justice, and employee health, simply not hiring smokers doesn't make sense.
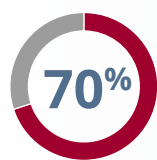
70% Nearly **70% of smokers** report they'd like to stop.

Tools **+** Policy **=** Quit

Employer-provided cessation resources combined with a tobacco-free policy are two proven factors that can help tobacco users quit for good.

4 How do I enforce a no-smoking policy at work? Who is responsible for enforcing the policy?

Most organizations find that placing the burden of enforcement solely on security staff is impractical. Instead, they ask and expect all employees to take part in enforcing the policy. However, not everyone will be comfortable approaching people who are violating the policy.

To alleviate this anxiety, offer training and "how-to" resources, including scripted messages that employees can simply read off cards, to help your staff speak to individuals in a non-confrontational manner.

You may also want to provide print materials (cards or brochures) with policy information and cessation resources that can be handed out without engaging smokers in debate.

5 What are common enforcement pitfalls with a tobacco-free policy?

Common pitfalls include:

Consistency: Make sure e-cigarettes, cigarettes, and chewing tobacco are treated the same, and that everyone on the campus—even vendors and contractors—are adhering to the policy.

Prevention: Identify and monitor "hot spots" where enforcement may be troublesome. Then swiftly take action to enforce your policy.

Responsibility: Most employees want smoke-free and vape-free workplaces. Making it the responsibility of everyone, and giving people tools (and backup from management) to address infractions, is best.

6 How do I handle penalties for employees who smoke in the workplace and violate company policy?

As a best practice, removing smoking from the workplace is more about creating a culture of wellness, and changing the social norms around smoking, rather than penalizing smokers.

However, as part of creating a culture of wellness for ALL employees, there are disciplinary actions you can take to hold those who violate company policy accountable.

For example, see what our client Generac does to hold tobacco users accountable to company policy by viewing "Kicking Butts: How to Help Employees Quit Tobacco with Incentives."

7 Where can I find templates of a workplace smoking/tobacco use policy?

Here are a few to start with:

American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation
Model Policy for a Smokefree Workplace

Smoking Cessation Leadership Center
Tobacco-free Policy Example

American Lung Association
Sample Tobacco-free Policy

8 How do smoking/tobacco policies change by industry? Are there different considerations for healthcare, for example, or those in hospitality?

Yes, there are a few considerations with different industries.

For hospitals/healthcare, special provisions might include:

- Expanding enforcement of the policy beyond employees—having the policy apply to volunteers and patients, too.

- Encouraging patients who smoke to quit by having staff offer counseling and other resources to assist them.

- Having language stipulate that no physicians with privileges may write orders for patients to use tobacco or smoking products on any of your properties.

However, always remember that different states have different regulations regarding tobacco use policies. The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), for example, tells its 50,000+ workers that smoking during the workday is banned, even if employees leave the hospital for lunch. Although the UPMC smoking ban is legal in Pennsylvania, it would not have been legal in other states with "smoker's rights" laws on the books. That's why it's important to check with legal counsel specific to your location for additional guidance on what you can and can't do.

> Every day, healthcare workers see the effects of addiction, including smoking. Why do people who understand the risks of smoking continue to do it? See
> **"Strange Bedfellows: Smoking and Healthcare Workers."**

For hospitality, special provisions might include:

- For restaurants, create policies that set expectations for breaks and make it clear that smoke breaks are unacceptable at other times. Also, consider implementing new after-rush-hour traditions besides heading out for smoke breaks.

- For hotels, make it clear through prominent signage and all guest touch points that your property is tobacco-free. And if guests do smoke in nonsmoking rooms, notify guests that you will collect stated fees for violating the policy. (Many times, <u>fees for guests who smoke</u> in nonsmoking rooms go uncollected.)

> For insights on how to help hospitality workers quit tobacco, see
> **"Want a Side of Cigarettes with That?
> How to Curb Smoke Breaks in Hospitality."**

9 What are key considerations for signage to communicate my company's policy?

Here are a few tips on how to communicate your policy through signage in the workplace:

- Make your tobacco-free status widely known. Prominently place signs around your property making it clear to employees and visitors about your smoke-free status.

- Word your signs carefully. Take a positive approach—be a "smoke-free property," instead of a place where "smoking is prohibited."

- Pay attention to the connotation of the words you choose for signs. For example, those that say "no smoking in this area" could be misinterpreted to mean there are smoking areas somewhere on the grounds. Instead, emphasize that the entire property is smoke-free.

- Consider other languages. Based on your population, it might be helpful to have additional signs in languages other than English.

This is a
Smoke-free
property

10 When implementing a tobacco-free policy, what is the best approach to also talk about quitting tobacco with employees who smoke?

While the great majority of smokers want to quit, a tobacco-free policy may still seem like a hardship to some.

Taking a compassionate approach combined with offering evidence-based support to quit can help alleviate the stress of complying with the new rules.

The good news for both employers and employees is that smoking cessation interventions are extremely cost effective, can double the odds of success, and literally save lives.

Looking for more guidance on tobacco-free policies? Download
"How to Get a Tobacco-free Workplace."

Partner with the EXperts to
Help Employees Quit Tobacco

The EX Program team provides in-depth, expert guidance on workplace policies, incentives, promotions, and more. See how we set your company up with best practices to help you save lives and save money.

The EX Program is the only quit-tobacco program that combines Mayo Clinic's treatment model with scientific leadership in digital tobacco solutions from Truth Initiative, a public health non-profit.

Developed in collaboration with
MAYO CLINIC

Revenue from the EX Program supports our mission-driven work to prevent youth from smoking, vaping, and using nicotine—and to help youth quit, if they've started.

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