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Oklahoma State Department of Health

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For Release: September 23, 2008
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Oklahoma Restaurants Not Adversely Impacted by Smoking Laws

Smoking restrictions in Oklahoma restaurants have had no adverse economic effect on restaurant business in the state, according to a report released today by the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

The report, authored by associate professor of economics Dr. Fritz Laux at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, marks the fifth anniversary of Oklahoma's current smoking laws on Sept. 1, 2008.

"Our report found that there was no negative impact on restaurants related to the change from smoking to smoke-free," Laux stated. "As in previous objective studies of similar changes in other places, the effects on restaurant sales and employment were neutral to slightly positive."

Both sales and employment in Oklahoma restaurants increased, not decreased, following the March 1, 2006, transition from smoking to nonsmoking, with sales up 5.63 percent for the next 12 months. These increases, both with and without controlling for changes in overall economic conditions, paralleled those in Kansas, which had no changes in its state smoking laws during the period studied.

Oklahoma's current smoking laws were adopted in 2003 and became effective for many public places and indoor workplaces on Sept. 1, 2003, though restaurants did not have to comply until March 1, 2006.

The current laws include loopholes exempting part or all of certain places, including smoking rooms in restaurants and all space within stand-alone bars,

even though these are workplaces with concentrated levels of secondhand smoke. A bill was recommended by senate committee in 2008 to repeal the exemptions, which would make all public places and indoor workplaces smoke-free. However, that legislation did not pass in the form proposed.

Efforts are expected again in the 2009 legislative session to repeal Oklahoma's smoking exemptions in an endeavor to improve the health status of Oklahomans and to prevent needless premature deaths and illnesses caused by exposure to secondhand smoke.

"All workers deserve protection from secondhand smoke in indoor workplaces in Oklahoma," said Secretary of Health and Commissioner of Health Dr. Michael Crutcher. "Momentum is mounting to assure smoke-free public places and workplaces in Oklahoma," he said. "It's time to close the loopholes to bring our state in line with 25 other states and with hundreds of cities that have already adopted laws for totally smoke-free restaurants and bars."

"These smoke-free laws and ordinances reflect both public opinion and also the growing knowledge among elected officials that the medical evidence overwhelmingly shows secondhand smoke to be a serious health hazard," Crutcher continued. "In Oklahoma, it is a sad fact that approximately 700 deaths of nonsmokers annually are attributed to secondhand smoke. This exposure is entirely preventable in public places and indoor workplaces. It's about health, and it's about time for Oklahoma to close these loopholes."

To access the report online, visit this Web site:

<http://www.ok.gov/breatheeasyok/documents/Review.pdf>.