

## **OSDH E-NEWS**

**Oklahoma State Department of Health**

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### **Oklahoma Restaurants Have One Year to Decide Smoking Policies**

Most Oklahoma restaurateurs agree that secondhand tobacco smoke is harmful and that health and cleanliness are among their top considerations in determining future smoking policies, according to a recent poll conducted by Oklahoma State University (OSU).

In accordance with the Oklahoma Smoking in Public Places and Indoor Workplaces Act, restaurants must adopt policies by March 1, 2006 – one year from today – that are either totally smokefree or that limit any smoking to fully enclosed and separately ventilated smoking rooms which do not allow any smoke to escape or migrate to nonsmoking areas. Although the act took effect 18 months ago on Sept. 1, 2003, it allowed restaurants extra time to comply.

State public health officials note that more than two-thirds of all restaurants in this state have already taken steps to become entirely nonsmoking.

“We applaud and thank the restaurants that have become entirely smokefree ahead of the legal deadline of March 1, 2006. For the health of their employees and patrons, we strongly encourage all others to do so as quickly as possible,” said State Health Commissioner Dr. Michael Crutcher. “Smokefree environments benefit the health of employees and customers alike, and research has shown these policies are good for business as well.”

The OSU School of Business conducted the telephone poll in October 2004. Because most fast food restaurants have already adopted entirely nonsmoking policies, 800 owners or managers of randomly selected non-fast-food restaurants were surveyed. Health concerns were ranked in the survey as the top issue affecting decisions on future smoking policies, considered important by 83 percent, with cleanliness and cleaning costs the second most important consideration at 82.3 percent.

Three other issues also were ranked as somewhat or very important by two-thirds or more of the respondents: demands by nonsmokers for smokefree environments (71.1

percent), safety and reduced liability (70.8 percent), and keeping up with or ahead of the competition (66.5 percent).

Among the respondents, 86.6 percent believed breathing secondhand smoke is harmful.

A state health department booklet, *To the Health of Your Business*, discusses several ways in which smokefree policies can be positive for restaurants from a business standpoint, in addition to the obvious health benefits. Among these factors are possible reductions in healthcare costs and reduced cleaning costs, both identified in the OSU poll as particularly important considerations for restaurants.

“Providing a healthful environment can be good for business as well as for health,” Dr. Crutcher said. “Some restaurant owners may still be concerned about the impact on their businesses if they were to go totally nonsmoking. After all, the big tobacco companies have been trying for years to frighten restaurant owners that restaurants would suffer if they went smokefree.

“The fact is that smokefree policies have no adverse affect on the restaurant industry. Consistently, all sound, objective studies of the economic effects of smokefree policies have shown this to be true. In addition, costs are likely to be lower for restaurants choosing to be smokefree.”

Crutcher said that although a restaurant may be permitted to create a smoking room under Oklahoma’s new laws, such rooms are typically costly to build and to operate, and a smoking room would still subject employees and patrons alike to hazardous secondhand smoke exposure. “Based on the health issues, we strongly encourage all restaurants in Oklahoma to be totally smokefree,” he urged.

To learn more about the OSU poll or to obtain informational materials regarding implementing smokefree policies at businesses and worksites, contact the Office of Tobacco Use Prevention at 405/271-3619.

### **Top Five Concerns of Oklahoma Restaurateurs In Determining Future Smokefree Policies**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Concern</b>	<b>% Very Important or Somewhat Important</b>
1	Health Concerns	83.0%
2	Cleanliness and Cleaning Costs	82.3%
3	Nonsmokers’ Demands for Smokefree	71.1%
4	Safety & Reduced Liability	70.8%
5	Keeping Up With or Ahead of the Competition	66.5%

OSU Survey October 2004, 800 Non- Fast-food Restaurant Owners/Managers

