

PRESS RELEASE

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Restaurants, Health Groups Join Vast Majority of Wisconsin Voters in Supporting Strong Smoke-Free Law, Poll Shows

Madison, WI – Nearly two-thirds of Wisconsin residents support a strong state law making all indoor public places and workplaces, including restaurants and bars, smoke-free, according to a new poll. The Wisconsin Restaurant Association and public health groups today announced they'll join forces for the first time ever to push such a measure.

In a Feb. 17-19 statewide telephone survey of 500 registered Wisconsin voters, 64% said they favor a statewide smoke-free law that includes restaurants and bars. This support comes from a broad-based coalition of voters, including large majorities of men and women, and young and old. Support for a smoke-free Wisconsin also cuts across party lines, including support from 73 percent of Democrats, 61 percent of independents and 58 percent of Republicans. Fully 81% of voters consider secondhand smoke to be a "serious" or "moderate" health hazard.

Restaurant and public health group representatives said today that they will work together to urge passage of a statewide smoke-free law that protects the right of all workers, residents and visitors to breathe smoke-free air in public places, including all restaurants and taverns.

"The only smoking ban that creates a 'level playing field' for all businesses and protects all employees is a comprehensive workplace ban statewide," said Ed Lump, president and CEO of the Wisconsin Restaurant Association.

The Wisconsin Restaurant Association's board recently voted 36-1 to back a strong statewide law as a response to growing concerns among Wisconsin's 16,000 restaurant owners about worker health and the need for consistent application of smoke-free laws to all hospitality outlets, including taverns.

The need for protection from secondhand smoke in all workplaces and public places has never been clearer. In issuing a groundbreaking report last June, U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona stated, "The debate is over. The science is clear: Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance, but a serious health hazard that causes premature death and disease in children and nonsmoking adults." The Surgeon General found that secondhand smoke is a proven cause of lung cancer, heart disease and serious respiratory illnesses.

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Food service workers have a 50% greater risk of dying from lung cancer than the public at large, according to studies published in the Journal of Occupational Health and Medicine and JAMA. In all, secondhand smoke kills 53,000 Americans each year, according to the National Cancer Institute.

“Every public place should be a smoke-free place,” said Paul Decker, a lung-cancer survivor and non-smoker who was exposed to secondhand smoke as a child. “Secondhand smoke is deadly, and it’s time for Wisconsin to ensure that no one in our state is subjected to that risk.”

The evidence is also clear that businesses have nothing to fear from the smoke-free law. There is overwhelming evidence from smoke-free states and cities around the country that smoke-free laws protect health without harming business. As the U.S. Surgeon General concluded in the June 2006 report on secondhand smoke, “Evidence from peer-reviewed studies shows that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse impact on the hospitality industry.”

Pollsters the Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies conducted the random survey, which has a margin of error of +/- 4.4%. The survey was sponsored by the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, and SmokeFree Wisconsin on behalf of the new campaign called “It’s Time...To Breathe Free.”

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