# MAKING YOUR WORKPLACE SMOKEFREE

## A DECISION MAKER'S GUIDE

*Chapter* **2**
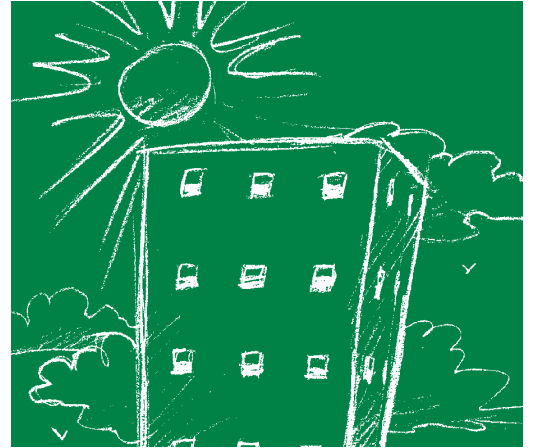
# BENEFITS OF A SMOKEFREE WORKPLACE
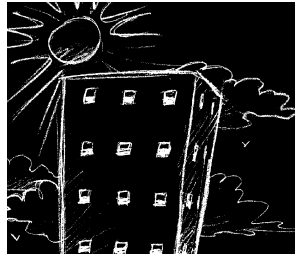
**A**ccording to the National Cancer Institute, most employees are nonsmokers, almost half of employees currently work in environments where smoking is prohibited in their work area or in public (shared) areas of their work site, and more than 80% work for companies that have an ETS policy.[1] Clearly, employers are addressing how to deal with smoking in the workplace. Figure 2-1 lists some of the many benefits for both employees and employers that accrue from a smokefree workplace.

## Support for Workplace Policies

Comprehensive smoking policies, including facility-wide smokefree policies, are not new. However, smokefree policies have received a significant boost over the last 10 years as evidence of the risks associated with exposure to ETS has mounted and the public has become more aware of these risks. According to Gallup surveys, Americans know about the risks posed by ETS and favor efforts to reduce exposure to it. In 1992, 97% of nonsmokers and 79% of current smokers agreed that exposure to ETS is harmful to healthy adults.[3] The percentage of Americans who favor some type of restriction on workplace smoking increased from 81% in 1983 to 94% in 1992.[3]

Employers have responded by implementing smokefree policies. A 1992 survey showed that 59% of private employers had either smokefree facility policies or permitted smoking only in separately ventilated smoking areas.[4] A smaller 1994 survey of employers with up to 25,000 employees found that 54% of companies had implemented smokefree policies and that only 7% had no smoking policy at all.[5]

## Employee Morale

An employer sends a clear message to employees and the community with a smokefree policy: We care about the health and safety of our employees. Scientific evidence proving that significant health risks are associated with ETS exposure supports employers against any claims of "harassing" employees or visitors who smoke. The employer's concern for the health of employees is especially clear in the case of employees who have conditions that make them vulner-

able to ETS, including employees who are pregnant or who have heart disease or allergies to tobacco smoke.

Support for employees who smoke goes hand in hand with policies that restrict smoking in the workplace. Helping employees who want to quit sends a straightforward message—the company cares about all employees, including smokers. More information about the kinds of support you may want to provide smokers is in Chapter Four.

## Productivity and Medical Costs

A smokefree workplace can enhance productivity in two ways: by reducing the effects of ETS on nonsmokers and by reducing excess smoking-related absenteeism among smokers who are motivated to quit as a result of the smokefree policy. For small businesses especially, which have employees who handle a variety of tasks, productivity can be greatly increased by reduced absenteeism.

A smoker who quits smoking could save employers an estimated $960 in excess illness costs each year.[6] Persons who quit smoking before age 65 were estimated to save from 40% to 67% of the lifetime excess medical costs of persons who continue to smoke.[7]

### FIGURE 2-1. BENEFITS OF A SMOKEFREE WORKPLACE[2]

**For the employees**

• A smokefree environment helps create a safe, healthful workplace.

• A well planned and carefully implemented effort by the employer to address the effects of smoking on employees' health and the health of their families shows the company cares.

• Workers who are bothered by smoke will not be exposed to it at the worksite.

• Smokers appreciate a clear company policy about smoking at work.

• Managers are relieved when a process for dealing with smoking in the workplace is clearly defined.

**For the employer**

• A smokefree environment helps create a safe, healthful workplace.

• Direct health care costs to the company may be reduced.

• Maintenance costs go down when smoke, matches, and cigarette butts are eliminated in facilities.

• Office equipment, carpets, and furniture last longer.

• It may be possible to negotiate lower health, life, and disability coverage as employee smoking is reduced.

• The risk of fires is lower.

## Corporate Image

Corporate image is important for many businesses. With nonsmokers accounting for about 75% of adult American consumers of goods and services, it is easy to see why many companies and organizations implement smokefree sites to influence consumers' opinions of the company. For example, to demonstrate

its commitment to providing a pleasant and safe dining environment, in 1994 McDonald's implemented smokefree environments in its 1,400 corporate-owned restaurants. Another service industry, Delta Airlines, banned smoking on all flights beginning January 1, 1995. See Appendix C for examples of organizations that have gone smokefree.

Such actions can improve a corporate image not only in the marketplace but also in hiring. Companies that demonstrate concern for the health and well-being of their workforce are more likely to be able to recruit and retain high-quality employees.

Because so many worksites are already smokefree, employers who have not instituted smokefree policies need to consider complying with community standards and expectations.

This chapter has described the benefits of developing and implementing comprehensive smoking policies—especially a smokefree policy. Chapter Three provides information to help you determine the best policy for your worksite.

# References

1. National Cancer Institute. Tobacco Use Supplement to the 1993 Current Population Survey, unpublished data. [Please note that these data refer to U.S. workers 20 years of age or older who worked outside their home, did not do work outdoors, were not self-employed, and who did not travel to different buildings or worksites.]

2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *A decision maker's guide to reducing smoking at the work-site.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and Office on Smoking and Health, 1985.

3. The Gallup Organization, Inc. *Survey of the public's attitudes toward smoking.* Princeton, NJ: The Gallup Organization, Inc., 1992.

4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *1992 Survey of work-site health promotion activities.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1992. (DHHS Publication No. 93-500023)

5. Smokenders International. 1994/95 *Report on smoking and the workplace.* Phoenix, AZ: Smokenders International, 1994.

6. Fisher KJ, Glasgow RE, Terborg JR. Worksite smoking cessation: A meta-analysis of long term quit rates from controlled studies. *Journal of Occupational Medicine* 1993;32:429–439.

7. Oster G, Colditz GA, Kelly NL. The economic costs of smoking and benefits of quitting for individual smokers. *Preventive Medicine* 1984;13:377–389.