

To win smokefree air where YOU live, go to
<http://www.smokefree.net/alerts.php>

Restaurants, bars gain business under smokefree law

Clean indoor air is good for business and good for health

Parts excerpted from the Boston Globe, 4/4/05

Sales and employment at Massachusetts restaurants and bars grew during the first six months of a statewide smokefree workplace law, disproving predictions that the law would inflict serious damage on the hospitality industry, Harvard researchers are scheduled to report today.

As part of the study, analysts from the Harvard School of Public Health tested the air in 27 bars and restaurants both before and after the ban went into effect last July 5. The result: Cancer-causing toxins plummeted by 93 percent once cigarettes, cigars, and pipes were banished.

The findings arrive as the campaign to eliminate smoking from its last indoor public havens gains momentum not just nationally but globally, with European nations, led by Ireland, moving to extinguish the tradition of a Scotch and a smoke at pubs, nightclubs, and restaurants.

It is a movement hailed as a signal public health triumph and a sweeping social shift. But an increasing body of evidence also suggests that what's good for the health of workers and patrons may also boost the bottom line of businesses.

"Now, we can tell other states considering this kind of law: 'If you implement this law, you're not only going to have a better work environment -- you don't have to affect the economics of your hospitality industry,'" said Gregory Connolly, an author of the Harvard study and former chief of the tobacco control program at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

The Harvard researchers reviewed state tax records for all restaurants, bars, and nightclubs from July through December of last year -- the first six months of the statewide ban -- and compared them with receipts for the comparable period in previous years.

To make an apples-to-apples comparison, the researchers took into account inflation. Even after doing that, they found that tax collections on meals rose about 9 percent after the ban went into effect compared with the July through December average for 1999 through 2003. The researchers also found that alcoholic beverage excise tax collections remained essentially steady.

Similarly, the figures showed a slight rise in the number of people working in restaurants and bars.

"We had anticipated and projected that, but no one believed us," said Joyce Redford, director of the North Shore Tobacco Control Program, which covers nine cities and towns. "Now look: Lo and behold, it's exactly what happened."

Even the business alliance that once stood determinedly in opposition to the ban, sending it to repeated defeats on Beacon Hill, concedes that the law has had no negative effects.

"It caused kind of a minor blip in business at first," said Gail Anastas, director of communications for the Massachusetts Restaurant Association. "But then they did things to attract people back. Everybody just wanted a level playing field, and when it went statewide, it made it the same for everyone."

The statewide smokefree workplace law, approved overwhelmingly by legislators and signed into law last year by Governor Mitt Romney, ended a patchwork of tobacco prohibitions that had begun one evening in November 1993. That's when the people of Brookline, gathered in Town Meeting, enacted what was then the most comprehensive smokefree workplace laws in the commonwealth's history.

In the years that followed, dozens of cities and towns approved similar laws, including Boston and most of its suburbs.

Almost overnight, lawmakers who once stood in rigid opposition to a statewide smokefree workplace law became equally staunch proponents.

Their zeal was frequently more political than medical: phones on Beacon Hill rang with calls from constituent restaurant and tavern owners fearful that competitors in communities without bans would poach smoking customers. "Level the playing field" became the rallying cry.

Brookline conducted some of the earliest studies evaluating the economic consequences of smoking bans and found that restaurants and bars overall in the town weren't hurt by the prohibition.

"It may happen that there are losses for some individual businesses that have staked their entire revenue stream on smokers," said Alan Balsam, Brookline's public health commissioner. "But those establishments are few and far between."

Businesses that violate the statewide ban are subject to fines of up to \$300, and smokers can be hit with penalties of up to \$100. But cities and towns have

found that once patrons and business owners have time to get used to the rule, compliance becomes uniform.

In Boston, where smoking was banned in May 2003, the Public Health Commission has recorded just a dozen violations since the start of this year, and none of them was for illegal smoking. Instead, they involved infractions such as failing to post the required no-smoking signs.

The state Department of Public Health as well as local health boards recorded a total of 498 complaints about improper puffing during the first six months of the regulation. It turned out that about two-thirds of those calls came from restaurant and bar workers complaining that their own employers weren't doing enough to prevent smoking, said Eileen Sullivan, director of tobacco control policy at the state public health agency.

The Harvard researchers found vastly different situations before and after the ban at the bars and restaurants they monitored in five cities, Lynn, Malden, Quincy, Waltham, and Worcester. Before the ban, smoke got in their eyes.

"When we went back after the ban," said Carrie Carpenter, one of the Harvard research analysts, "it was much more enjoyable to go in there. It was more like a restaurant and less like a dirty bar."

George Harrington has run a restaurant and bar in downtown Salem for 15 years, and on Friday night, his Lyceum Bar & Grill was electric with activity. There was a time when his bar was a haven for inveterate smokers, so he greeted a tobacco ban with trepidation.

But, then, something unexpected happened.

"We're serving a lot more food at the bar," Harrington said, over the clink of glasses and clatter of plates. "People like sitting at the bar, chatting and eating. They didn't do it before because there might be somebody sitting next to them smoking. That's been a major plus for our bar business.

"And now I can wear a shirt two days in a row."

To win smokefree air where YOU live, go to

<http://www.smokefree.net/alerts.php>

Joseph W. Cherner

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

To search the JoeCherner-announce archives, go to:

<http://smokefree.net/JoeCherner-announce/messages>