

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Gambling with Lives: Air Quality at Area Casinos Found to be Unhealthy** **Local Health Organizations Call for Total Smoking Ban in Area Casinos**

*Kansas City, MO* – Air quality testing in five area casinos found unhealthy levels of air due to secondhand smoke. The study released today by Clean Air Metro KC, Metropolitan Healthy Communities Coalition and the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City (HCF) prompted the organizations to call for total smoking bans in area casinos.

Stan Cowan of the MU School of Medicine, University of Missouri Health System in Columbia, MO analyzed the air quality testing done in ten smoking and nonsmoking sections of five casinos in Kansas City, North Kansas City, Riverside and Kansas City, KS between June 10<sup>th</sup> and October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010. He noted that due solely to their occupational exposure, a full-time employee in a Kansas City area casino would be exposed to 106% the EPA's average annual limit for particulate matter air pollution during an 8-hour work shift.

"It's time to stop gambling with people's health," said Norm Siegel, Chairman of the HCF Board of Directors. "We encourage our area city councils to recognize that the health of casino customers and employees is no less valuable than that of customers and employees in other work and public places."

Don Potts, MD, associate professor at UMKC who is with the Metropolitan Healthy Communities Coalition explained why the unhealthy rating is dangerous for casino employees and patrons. "The extremely small size of these particles not only allow them to be easily inhaled deep into the lungs aggravating conditions such as asthma and bronchitis, but also to pass into the bloodstream to increasing the risk for cardiovascular effects, including heart attack or stroke."

Local smoking ordinances including the ones for Kansas City and North Kansas City currently prohibit smoking in public places and workplaces but allow smoking on casino floors until

legislation requires gaming floors to be smokefree for all casinos in Clay, Jackson and Platte in Missouri and Kansas counties of Johnson and Wyandotte. Riverside has no smoking ordinance. 7<sup>th</sup> Street Casino in Kansas City, KS is under the jurisdiction of the Wyandotte Nation, and a second casino, Hollywood Casino at the Speedway in Wyandotte County, is scheduled to open in 2012.

Teresa Price, a former Las Vegas casino dealer for 25 years told a gathering of health care advocates at HCF's office in Kansas City today, that she has lost colleagues who died from exposure to smoke on the casino floors. Price, who has been diagnosed with heart disease, became an advocate for smokefree casinos in Las Vegas and later was fired from her casino job in 2005. She now serves on the board of Smoke Free Gaming. Price has a message for Kansas City area casino employees. "No one deserves to lose their health in order to get a paycheck," Price said.

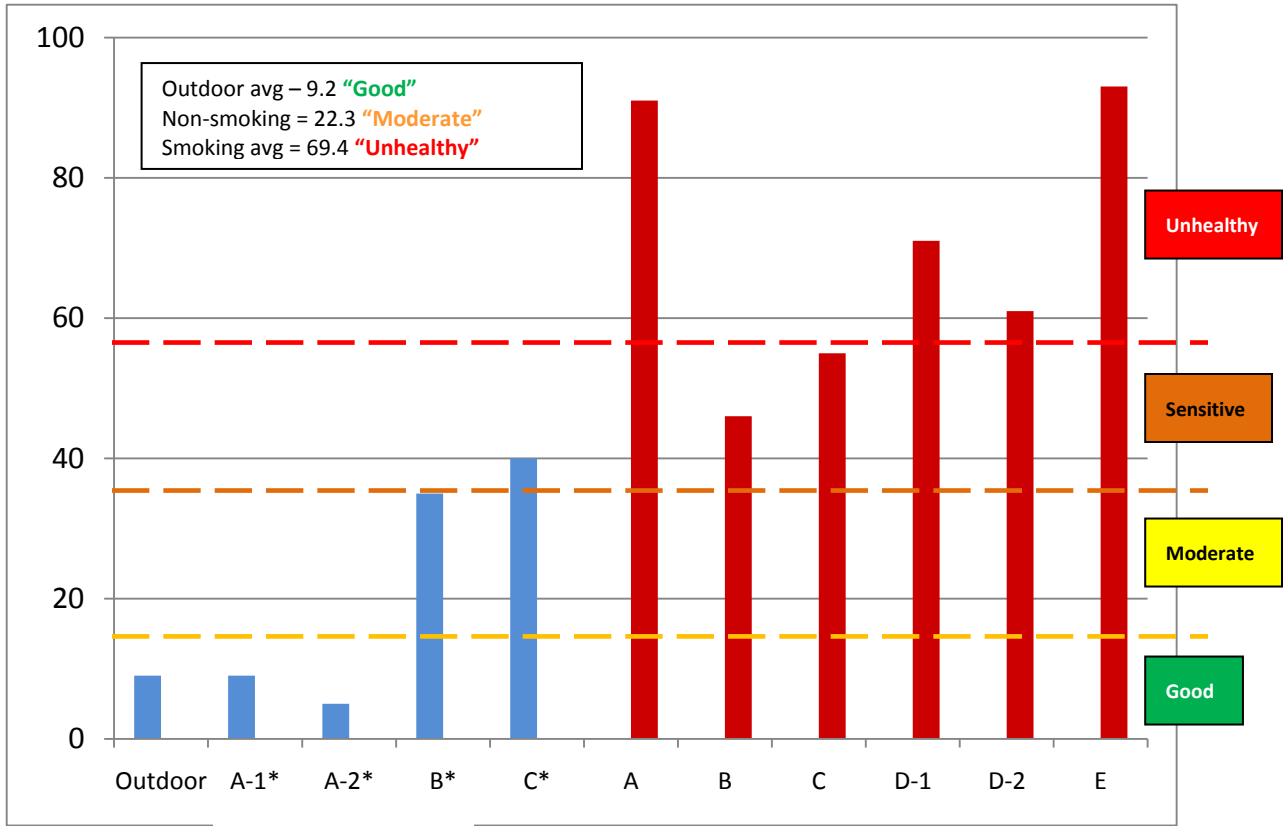
The health concerns extend to patrons as well. A recently published national study on air quality in 66 smoking-allowed casinos found less than two hours exposure to secondhand smoke is enough to impair the heart's ability to pump blood, placing susceptible casino patrons and workers at acute risk of heart disease.

With such evidence becoming more established and recognized by legislators, the National Council of Legislators from Gaming States passed a resolution in 2009 to support smokefree policies as a condition for issuing or renewing state gaming licenses.<sup>1</sup> Kansas is represented on this council and that state's legislature considered but did not approve a bill in 2011 to remove the casino exemption for their state smokefree law. Missouri on the other hand is not a member of this council and a bill for a state law for smokefree workplaces and public places was not reported out of committee this past session. Currently, 18 states have laws requiring non-tribal casinos to be smokefree.

Other highlights from the report:

- Separate smoking and non-smoking sections did not prevent pollutants in the smoking sections from contaminating the air in the non-smoking sections.
- On average, only 16.8% of people were actively smoking in the locations where smoking was permitted. This is one-fourth lower than the adult smoking prevalence of 22.4% for urban Jackson County, and refutes the commonly held misperception that a higher percent of casino customers or employees smoke.

The air quality report and other information may be obtained from Clean Air Kansas City Metro at [www.cleanairkc.com](http://www.cleanairkc.com)



\*Non-smoking areas

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