

Secondhand Smoke Exposure in the Workplace

- The workplace is a major source of secondhand smoke exposure for adults.
- Secondhand smoke exposure in the workplace has been linked to an increased risk for heart disease and lung cancer among adult nonsmokers.
- In 2001-02, about 30 percent of indoor workers in the United States were not covered by smoke-free workplace policies, down from 54 percent in 1992-93.
- According to HHS's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as of June 1, 2006, 14 states have laws in effect that make private workplaces smoke-free. In addition, numerous employers and businesses have implemented voluntary smoke-free workplace policies.
- Blue collar and service employees are less likely than white collar indoor workers to be covered by smoke-free policies.
- Restaurant employees are far less likely than other workers to be protected by smoke-free workplace policies, more likely than other workers to have these policies violated where they do exist and are more likely to be exposed to high levels of secondhand smoke on the job. Only 43 percent of this population work under 100 percent smoke-free workplace policies. Only 28 percent of wait staff and 13 percent of bartenders work under such policies. As of 2002, over 6.6 million Americans worked in food preparation and service occupations. One in five workers in these occupations is a teen, 56 percent are women, almost 20 percent are Hispanic, and just under 12 percent are African American.
- The Surgeon General has concluded that smoke-free workplace policies are the only effective way to eliminate secondhand smoke exposure in the workplace. Separating smokers from nonsmokers, cleaning the air, and ventilating buildings cannot eliminate exposure.
- The Surgeon General has also concluded that workplace smoking restrictions lead to less smoking among covered workers.