

States, businesses snuff out smoking



By Leah Carlson Shepherd

Lighting up isn't as easy as it used to be.

Colorado, New Jersey, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico passed a public smoking bans this year. More than a dozen states have banned smoking in most public places and government buildings in recent years, and many cities and counties in other states have followed suit (See chart on page 38.). In addition, some cities in states where a smoking ban already exists have passed their own, more restrictive laws.

At the same time, the number of private employers cracking down on smoking continues to mount. In fact, 36% of employers offer a smoking cessation program, while 20% prohibit smoking at the worksite and 7% charge smokers higher medical premiums, according to the Society for Human Resource Management.

"The number of employers engaging directly is growing by leaps and bounds," says Sean Bell, vice president of product management at Free & Clear, which provides tobacco cessation programs.

Boeing tackles tobacco

Boeing Co., a Seattle-based aerospace manufacturing firm, launched a new, innovative smoking cessation program for its employees on April 28. It combines online coaching, phone-based counseling, medications and printed materials through Free & Clear.

After six weeks on the program, at least 33% of Web coach users said they had not smoked for seven or more days, compared to just 9% of non-users. Furthermore, Web coach users had not smoked for an average of 22 days at the six-week follow-up, compared to just nine days for non-users. Boeing, with a staff of 150,000, has offered Free & Clear's telephone counseling services as a benefit since November 2002 and has seen 8,500 workers use the program.

This fits in with Boeing's overall approach to promote prevention in

health care, according to Mike Brennan, manager of Boeing's wellness programs. "Supporting the people who want to quit smoking was something

we wanted to do," he says. "We thought it made all the sense in the world. You have three prongs working at keeping the person engaged. We've been very pleased with the actual program itself."

Participants can use the program to read about the benefits of quitting, complete a self-assessment, keep a quit diary and calculate the costs tobacco use. They also can

identify their smoking triggers and coping skills, learn how to cope with stress and cravings and participate in discussion forums with quit coaches and peers who are quitting. The program helps them to schedule and prepare for a quit date, track their successes, watch their savings grow



Mike Brennan, manager of wellness programs at Boeing

after they quit and select a nicotine replacement therapy — patches, gum, lozenges, nasal spray or inhaler. This process can last six to 12 months.

“One of the things we wanted to strengthen was the time in between phone calls,” Bell tells *EBN*. “[Web coaching] is where the new frontier is. We’re trying to create bridges to smokers.”

Smoking costs employers \$157 billion per year in lost productivity and medical expenses.

Participants also can use the program to prevent relapses and maintain healthier habits. “It really is a very powerful tool for that,” Bell indicates. Free & Clear keeps the identity of participants confidential to comply with medical privacy laws.

About 83% of users report being “very satisfied” with the Web coaching, and more than two-thirds said they found the content to be “very helpful.”

Phone counseling alone generally yields a 30% quit rate, and only 4% of people who try to quit smoking without formal support will succeed, Bell notes. The biggest obstacles to quitting include physical addiction, psychological addiction and hard-to-break behavioral and social patterns.

Boeing pays for the smoking cessation program and nicotine replacement therapy for its workers and their spouses. So far, “we know it has had an impact, but we cannot quantify it. Between the absenteeism and presenteeism [for smokers], there is a definite impact on productivity,” Brennan remarks.

Workers are not permitted to smoke inside Boeing’s buildings, but some worksites have designated outdoor smoking areas. The company

does not impose higher medical premiums on smokers.

It promotes the smoking cessation program through a multitude of venues, including mailed fliers, company newsletters, collaborations with an employee assistance program, a disease management program, and doctors who can refer smokers to Free & Clear. Still, “we continue to be amazed by the number of people who don’t know that the program exists, [that] it’s free, [and that] it’s private,” Brennan remarks.

Heavy toll

The financial impact of smoking has opened some employers’ eyes. Smoking costs employers \$157 billion per year in lost productivity and medical expenses and kills 440,000 people per year, Bell says. The total excess cost to a company per smoker per year is \$5,606, including \$1,882 attributable to smoke breaks, \$1,623 for excess medical expenditures and \$341 for missed work days due to sickness. Smokers are absent from work

2.7 days more than nonsmokers, Free & Clear reports.

Statistics show that public education messages, smoking bans and employer efforts have contributed to a gradual decline in smoking rates. “We’ve done a good job of stigmatizing smokers in the United States,” Bell says.

The national smoking rate was 20.9% in 2004, down from 21.6% in 2003 and 22.5% in 2002, according to the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Smoking prevalence is highest in Kentucky (27.6%), West Virginia, (26.9%), Oklahoma (26.1%), and Tennessee

36% of employers offer a smoking cessation program.

(26.1%). It is lowest in Utah (10.5%), California (14.8%), and Idaho (17.5%). Tobacco use tends to be more prevalent among blue-collar workers, military personnel and residents in Southern states, Bell observes. — **L.S.**

States with smoking bans in most public places

Alabama	Georgia	Rhode Island
California	Idaho	Utah
Colorado	Massachusetts	Washington
Delaware	New Jersey	
Florida	New York	

