

Texas Promotes Cessation by Increasing Smoking Footage Requirements Outside of Buildings

“The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) aims to provide a healthy environment on DSHS property with regard to the use of tobacco products to reduce risks associated with secondhand smoke and to define expectations with respect to a tobacco-free environment.”—Texas Tobacco Use Policy

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) staff members have made it their mission to “promote optimal health by ensuring a healthy work environment for [DSHS] employees, patients, and visitors.” As part of this commitment, DSHS has implemented a policy to extend tobacco use restrictions from all DSHS grounds to areas off campus. This policy is a continuation of previous successes by DSHS in reducing the use of tobacco products within its campuses. For example, the state’s 10 psychiatric in-patient facilities have been smoke-free since 1999. Previously, smoking within 15 feet of the DSHS building perimeter and entrances was banned. However, due a structural reorganization at DSHS, all policies had to be reviewed and reapproved, providing an opportunity to strengthen the tobacco use policy. In 2005, the policy was revised to prohibit the use of all tobacco products on DSHS property. Some current smokers who work at DSHS opposed implementing the expanded policy, but with continued due diligence and adequate training on the policy’s requirements, the DSHS property is currently free of tobacco product use.

- Implementing the new policy resulted in 145 new employees enrolled in smoking cessation programs provided at DSHS.
- Managers report better productivity among employees.

Steps Taken:

Effective on May 12, 2005, the DSHS chief operating officer approved a new policy prohibiting the use of all tobacco products on any DSHS-owned property. This includes the use of tobacco products by all employees who live or work on the DSHS campus, as well as campus visitors and patients. Smoking prohibitions apply to all campus property, including the inside of buildings, the outside grounds, and state-owned vehicles. They are also applicable to properties that DSHS leases and non-state property adjacent to the DSHS property, such as streets and sidewalks.

All campus facilities were given six months to adopt the tobacco-free policy protocols. Part of the adoption process included developing and implementing tobacco cessation programs available for employees, visitors, and patients; training employees and staff; and enforcing the policy. DSHS posted tobacco-free property signs on campus, focusing signage in areas where smoking frequently occurred. Current smokers were encouraged to take advantage of tobacco cessation trainings and programs through other areas of DSHS’s worksite wellness initiatives, patient care programs, and the DSHS tobacco prevention program. Clinicians were trained to provide smoking cessation programs and were utilized to counsel patients about cessation. DSHS employees and other people primarily working or living on the property are responsible for enforcing the policy. Possible violations are reported to the employee’s supervisor and disciplinary action may be taken. When necessary, the chief operating officer is responsible for enforcement as well.

Results:

After the policy implementation date, general compliance by employees and visitors was not a major issue. As a result of the implementation, there was an increase in the number of employees enrolled in tobacco cessation programs, with 145 new enrollees seeking to quit smoking. Managers reported improved productivity and reduced absenteeism among employees, and the policies led to more DSHS employees quitting tobacco use.

The new policy received recognition from outside DSHS as well. Achieving a smoke-free campus garnered support from nonprofit organizations such as the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society. As one of the first successful implementations of a tobacco-free campus in Texas, the policy has been used as a model elsewhere. As a result, and with the help of the DSHS strategy, the University of Texas at Austin is now a smoke-free campus. Other agencies are also expanding their smoking footage allowances or are in the process of developing their own smoke-free campus policies, including other state departments, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission building, the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Information Center on the Austin State Hospital campus, and the Employees Retirement System of Texas building.

Although a majority of the results were favorable, the policy's implementation had some unanticipated outcomes. Upper and middle management easily approved the policy, but there was some pushback from employees who felt they were being punished for smoking. Smokers were opposed to walking to the edge of campus to smoke. Additionally, as a result of not allowing smoking on DSHS campus, smokers moved to city sidewalks, adjacent parking structures off campus, and used bus stops as shelter for smoking during inclement weather. However, DSHS employees may not visibly use tobacco products on non-state property contiguous to DSHS property or when performing official duties.

Lessons Learned:

Representatives from DSHS reported a smooth transition from the 15-foot requirement to the smoke-free campus policy. The easy transition and overall success of the program are partially credited to the fact that the implementation strategy only included upper-level management in the planning and policy writing. The decision to implement from the top down was made to decrease the time it would take for the new policy to become effective. However, one unforeseen circumstance of this decision was that groups of smokers moved beyond campus grounds to smoke in areas like parking garages and bus stops, which became an issue, due to the effects of secondhand smoke and other associated environmental concerns. For future implementation, it may be beneficial to work with surrounding agencies and buildings to ban smoking in these areas as well, when possible.

Noncompliance with the policy was more likely during bad weather. Due to the climate in Texas, heat and rain were issues that made people want to stay close to the premises. DSHS realized that, in extreme weather, removing butt-cans did not stop smokers from gathering in certain areas. To address issues of noncompliance, signage was increased in these common areas and offenders were reminded of the policy. After these actions, repeat offenses were minimal and no higher level of disciplinary action was necessary.



Worksite Wellness Initiatives in State Health Agencies: Texas

It is difficult to determine the health effects of this type of policy. Agencies and organizations looking to implement similar programs or policies should consider conducting a thorough evaluation so that the program's benefits can be reported with measurable data. Having data representing successful implementation and beneficial health outcomes will attract supporters and persuade other states or agencies to follow by example.

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