



TOBACCO-FREE PARKS AND RECREATION STUDY

Summary of Findings

Park areas in Minnesota are used regularly by state residents. Tobacco use restrictions in outdoor environments such as parks and recreation areas are being established in Minnesota and other states across the U.S. The purpose of this study is to describe the support for tobacco-free park policies in Minnesota. To learn more about the public's perceptions of these policies, we conducted a survey of Minnesota residents. We also interviewed park and recreation professionals to ask specific questions about tobacco-free policies in Minnesota.

Is secondhand smoke a problem?

Yes. Secondhand smoke is a recognized cause of acute and chronic diseases in nonsmokers, and is a major source of indoor air pollution. Secondhand smoke is also responsible for an estimated 3,000 lung cancer deaths and 38,000 heart disease deaths in nonsmoking individuals each year in the United States. The most effective approach to reducing secondhand smoke exposure is to establish smoke-free environments. Research has suggested that the adoption of smoke-free policies creates a change in social norms around smoking, helps smokers reduce consumption or quit, and helps keep youth from starting.

Public support for tobacco-free parks

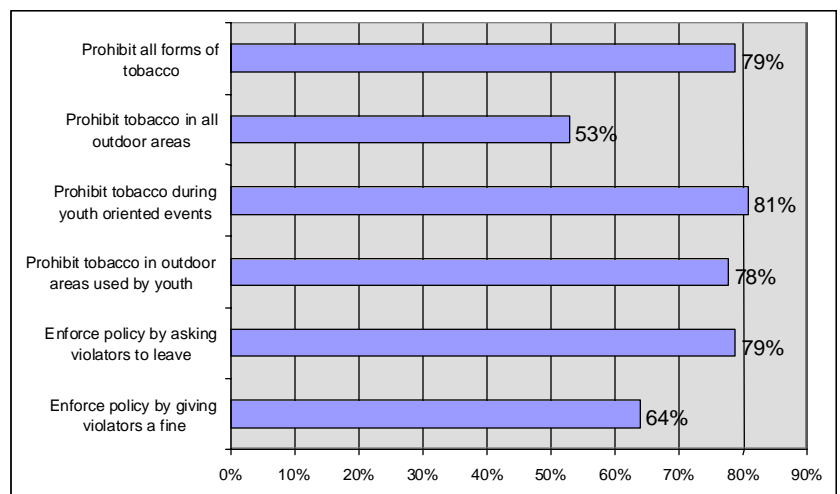
A survey was sent to Minnesota residents by mail in summer 2004. Of the 1,500 respondents, 75% had used any park area in the past month. Overall, 70% of those surveyed supported tobacco-free policies for outdoor park and recreation areas. The attitude of Twin Cities metro area residents was not different from residents living in other parts of the state. Respondents expressed support for tobacco-free policies to:

- Reduce litter in park grounds.
- Avoid the health effects of secondhand smoke.
- Discourage youth smoking.
- Establish positive role models for youth.
- Promote community well-being.

Policy components

We also asked residents about the components of tobacco-free park policies (shown, right). Most people supported strong policies that prohibit tobacco use in youth areas, and asking policy violators to leave park areas. Just over half (53%) of respondents supported the prohibition of tobacco use in all parks at all times. Smokers were the only group generally less supportive of these policies.

Preferences for tobacco-free park policies among Minnesota residents, 2004



Golfers

Thirty-five percent of our sample were golfers. Most golfers (81%) were non-smokers, and 74% of non-smoking golfers supported tobacco-free park policies. We found that being a golfer did not make a difference in support for tobacco-free policies, but being a smoker did.

How do park staff in communities with an existing park policy feel about the policy?

In the summer of 2004, we interviewed 257 park directors from cities and counties in Minnesota's 200 largest cities. Overall, 70 communities reported a tobacco-free policy, which represents 36% of communities surveyed. Park directors with policies had positive experiences, as most reported that park policies were "not difficult" to pass, and 90% would recommend such a policy to other communities.

Changes after implementation

When park directors were asked about changes after tobacco-free policy adoptions:

- 58% reported less litter in park areas.
- 74% reported no problems with policy violators.
- 88% reported no changes in park usage.
- For those reporting a change in park use following the policy, 71% reported an increase in usage.
- Publicity about the policy was reported to be adequate (86%), and few (7%) reported any negative publicity.

Enforcement

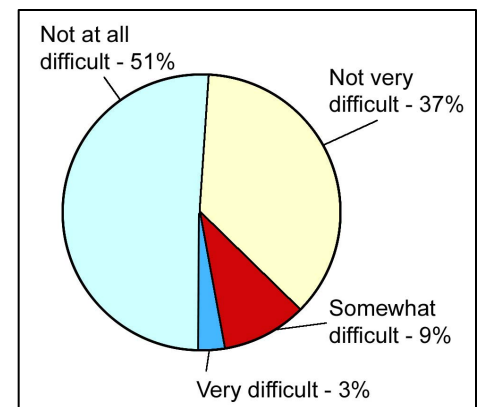
Enforcement was an area of worry for nearly all park directors without a policy. However, in communities with a policy, few park directors (26%) reported compliance problems. Staffing was an issue, as 74% reported too few staff to enforce the policy and/or monitor all park areas.

Park director support

Out of the 257 park directors interviewed, nearly all personally supported tobacco-free policies. Reasons for their support included:

- 96% wanted to establish positive role models for youth.
- 89% wanted to promote community well-being.
- 92% wanted to reduce youth opportunity to smoke.
- 92% wanted to avoid litter from cigarette butts.

Difficulty in passing a tobacco-free park policy, Minnesota 2004



Major Conclusions:

- ❑ The majority of Minnesotans support tobacco-free park and recreation policies.
- ❑ Park staff have experienced few problems and many benefits with the policies, and overwhelmingly recommend tobacco-free policies to other communities.

This study was conducted by the University of Minnesota, Schools of Public Health and Kinesiology, in partnership with Tobacco-Free Youth Recreation and the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association, and supported by the Minnesota Partnership for Action Against Tobacco. For more information, contact study coordinator Liz Klein at klein_L@epi.umn.edu or call (612) 626-1799.

