

The Risks of Secondhand Smoke in Casinos



Secondhand smoke (SHS) is an occupational hazard for many casino workers- from dealers to security. Job-related exposure to SHS is a significant, but entirely preventable, cause of premature death among U.S. workers.^{i, ii, iii} While 28 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have 100% smoke-free laws covering all workplaces, restaurants, and bars, only 22 states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands require state-regulated gaming facilities to be 100% smoke-free.^{iv} Several tribal casinos have temporary smoke-free policies due to COVID-19 and the Navajo Nation recently passed a permanent 100% smoke-free policy that includes casinos.^v A 100% smoke-free law that includes casinos is the only way to keep all casino workers and patrons safe from the harms of SHS.

Only 22 states require state-regulated gaming facilities to be 100% smoke-free.

SECONDHAND SMOKE: RISKING WORKERS' HEALTH

Casino workers are at higher risk for SHS-related illness than other workers:

- The National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) and the U.S. Surgeon General have found that occupational exposure to SHS increases workers' risk of lung cancer and other diseases.^{vi, vii, viii}
- Nicotine concentrations in the air in casinos, bars, billiard halls, bowling alleys, and bingo parlors were found to be 2.4-18.5 times higher than in offices or residences, and 1.5-11.7 times higher than in restaurants.^{ix} Another study found that smoke particles were approximately 12 times greater inside casinos than outside.^x
- A study examining casino dealers' occupational exposure to SHS in three casinos found that they were exposed to nicotine and a number of toxins – including carcinogens^{xi} benzene, naphthalene, formaldehyde, and acetaldehyde.^{xii}
- Patrons were also found to have significantly elevated levels of a tobacco-specific lung carcinogen after a four-hour visit to a casino that allowed smoking.^{xiii, xiv}
- SHS and unsafe levels of smoke-related pollutants have been found throughout the entire casino gaming area, suggesting that casino patrons as well as other casino employees (e.g. servers, cashiers, security personnel) may incur the same level of SHS exposure as dealers and supervisors.^{xv} A study examining levels of SHS in 21 Nevada casinos with non-smoking restaurants adjacent to gaming areas where smoking was allowed found that the non-smoking areas still had an average of 60% of the amount of SHS as the areas where smoking was allowed.^{xvi}
- A study on the impact of SHS in Pennsylvania casinos found that exposure causes five times as many premature deaths as Pennsylvania mining disasters.^{xvii}

"The cigarette smoke in the casinos was hurting me so badly that I was struggling to breathe."

– Alecia Sibio, Former Casino Worker^{xiii}

IMPROVING WORKERS' HEALTH

Smoke-free casino laws reduce exposure to SHS and improve the health of casino workers and patrons:

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- NIOSH and the Surgeon General recommend that ALL workers be protected from involuntary exposure to SHS.^{xviii, xix}
- Research has shown that smoke-free policies reduce workers' long-term risk of lung cancer and cardiovascular disease.^{xx, xxi, xxii, xxiii, xxiv, xxv}
- Comprehensive smoke-free policies also reduce the risk of hospitalizations and death from heart, stroke, and lung diseases.^{xxvi} More comprehensive smoke-free laws had an even greater impact on risk of disease and death.
- A study examined changes in indoor air quality in two casinos before and after implementation of a 2021 smoke-free law in Shreveport, LA. The study found that prior to implementation of the law, air quality inside the casinos exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's threshold for safety. However, two and half months after implementation, concentration of particulate matter had dropped substantially to a level that was no longer considered unhealthy for workers or patrons.^{xxvii}
- A study comparing SHS particulate levels in 66 U.S. casinos where smoking is allowed with three non-smoking casinos found that the smoke-free casinos had, on average, 94% lower levels of SHS particulate.^{xxviii} In about half of the smoking casinos, the SHS levels exceeded a level known to increase cardiovascular risk in those who do not smoke after less than 2 hours of exposure, posing acute health risks for patrons and workers. In casinos with a non-smoking section, the ventilation and separation systems were unable to remove the majority of the SHS that a comprehensive smoke-free law removed.^{xxix}
- Another study found a 19.1% decrease in ambulance calls originating from Colorado casinos as a result of the extension of smoke-free laws to casinos.^{xxx}

IMPROVING THE BOTTOM LINE

Smoke-free casino laws are popular and good for business.

- There is strong public support for making casinos smoke-free. A 2017 nationally representative survey found that 75% of adults who visit casinos "several times a year" support smoke-free laws%.^{xxxi}
- A 2021 poll of New Jersey voters found that voters supported permanently prohibiting smoking indoors at New Jersey casinos by a margin of 2 to 1. Further, 70% of voters said they would prefer to visit a smoke-free casino over one that allows smoking, and 89% agreed that casino workers have the right to breathe clean, smoke-free air. There was support for smoke-free casinos across political and demographic groups.^{xxxii}
- When smoking is allowed in the workplace, business owners have additional costs for increased health, life, and fire insurance premiums, higher workers' compensation payments, higher worker absenteeism, and lower worker productivity.^{xxxiii, xxxiv, xxxv}
- Smoke-free laws don't negatively impact business. Studies on the impact of smoke-free gaming laws in Illinois, Delaware and Kentucky showed that the laws had no effect on total gaming revenue.^{xxxvi, xxxvii, xxxviii} And a Massachusetts study found that 100% smoke-free ordinances did not negatively affect profits from bingo and other gambling sponsored by charitable organizations.^{xxxix}
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of casinos have voluntarily gone smoke-free. As of November 2021, more than 1,000 U.S. casinos are smoke-free.^{xl} These decisions are proving to be good for business, as well as health. For example, in Pennsylvania, the only casino to operate smoke-free^{xli} is the highest grossing casino in

the state in 2021 and continues to gain market share.^{xlii, xliii} The New Jersey governor temporarily required casinos to be smoke-free for about a year during 2020-2021. During the first quarter of 2021, when casinos were smoke-free, profits were 11% higher than during the same period in 2019.^{xliv}

ACS CAN ON SMOKE-FREE CASINOS

ACS CAN supports 100% smoke-free laws that prohibit smoking in all workplaces, including gaming facilities. These policies are key to protecting people who do not smoke – including workers – from the deadly effects of secondhand smoke.

ACS CAN does not support smoke-free laws that allow for separating people who smoke from people who do not smoke or ventilating buildings as alternatives to requiring a 100% smoke-free environment. The evidence is overwhelming that these measures cannot eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. ACS CAN supports including the use of marijuana and e-cigarettes in 100% smoke-free laws.

ACS CAN's work to create 100% smoke-free environments is part of a comprehensive approach to addressing tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke in the United States. ACS CAN urges policymakers and community leaders to pass laws and policies that make all gaming facilities 100% smoke-free.

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