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Steven F. Scanlin and Russell A. Duke: Smoke-free laws don't negatively impact local businesses

READER'S VIEW SMOKING LAWS

BY STEVEN F. SCANLIN AND RUSSELL A. DUKE - Idaho Statesman

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Everyone has a right to breathe clean indoor air in public places. Eagle was poised to be the first Idaho municipality to protect people from suffering the harmful effects of secondhand smoke, but the City Council voted to table the clean air ordinance. In the meantime, Idaho's city of Moscow unanimously passed a smoking ban similar to what was being considered by Eagle.

In a July 6 Reader's View ("Ordinance would have done little, except hurt businesses"), Eagle City Council member Jeanne Jackson-Heim stated that she felt this particular ordinance "might negatively affect our local businesses during tough economic times."

All legitimate economic impact studies on business show either no economic effect or a positive one after a smoke-free law is enacted. Following the growth in smoke-free laws nationwide, a parallel increase has occurred in the false allegations from the tobacco companies and their allies that smoke-free laws will hurt local economies and business. In fact, numerous careful scientific and economic analyses show that smoke-free laws do not hurt restaurant and bar patronage, employment, sales or profits. At worst, the laws have no effect at all, and they sometimes even produce slightly positive trends. More information on this subject is available at <http://www.no-smoke.org>.

Local policy should be driven by sound scientific evidence. The number of peer-reviewed economic studies showing that smoke-free laws have either no economic effect or a positive one continues to mount as more communities pass and implement strong smoke-free laws. According to the American Nonsmoker's Right Foundation, as of July 1, there were 617 municipalities with a local law in effect that requires 100 percent smoke-free workplaces.

Clean air ordinances create a positive impact as non-smokers and families feel attracted to and are more likely to go to businesses and communities with clean air. The 2007 Idaho Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) health survey results reveal nearly 81 percent of Idaho adults do not smoke, so a clean air policy would benefit and appeal to the majority.

With the overwhelming scientific evidence that secondhand tobacco smoke is a direct cause of lung cancer, heart disease, and lung infections, Central District Health Department supports policy that will reduce exposure. All workers have the right to be protected from secondhand smoke exposure.

The 2006 Surgeon General's Report on Secondhand Smoke clearly states that "there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke." The evidence is clear that there is a need for protection from secondhand smoke in all workplaces and public places. Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, including at least 69 carcinogens. The report provides additional documentation that "workplace smoking restrictions are effective in reducing secondhand smoke exposure, lead to less smoking among covered workers, and establishing smoke-free workplaces is the only effective way to ensure that secondhand smoke exposure does not occur in the workplace."

The tabled Eagle City ordinance would have gone a step beyond Idaho's Clean Indoor Air Law by protecting all workers from secondhand smoke, which can cause life-threatening diseases including heart disease and lung cancer, as well as reduce the economic costs of tobacco-related health care costs.

Community leaders should take the time to review the evidence and create policies that advance the health of their communities. Going smoke-free is good for health, good for business and good for Idaho. Eagle City Council is encouraged to reconsider its recent vote and pass a clean air ordinance. With the council's help, we will all breathe a little easier.

The Central District Health Department is working within the community to decrease the impact of tobacco use and stands eager and willing to assist on the smoke-free issue.

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