

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR A SMOKEFREE WORKPLACE

Developing and implementing a communications plan that tells employees what they need to know about the new smokefree policy – and one that does so in a positive way – is central to the overall success of the policy. Key elements of a communications plan include a listing of the target audiences, effective messages and appropriate messengers for each audience, the appropriate media or methods to reach each audience, and a timeline for all activities.

Identifying target audiences. For most companies, there are four primary audiences:

- All employees affected by the policy
- Managers who need special briefing and training about their role in implementing the policy
- Shareholders, customers, and the general population
- Mass media

Developing effective messages. Your communications plan should use the results of the situation analysis and outreach (discussed in the section entitled “Employee Support for a Smokefree Workplace”) to identify information and messages each audience needs to understand. Strategies for developing effective messages include:

- Keep all communications positive and focused on your company’s genuine interest in promoting health and safety.
- Make sure employees understand that the policy will be implemented fairly in a process in which smokers and non-smokers are represented, and that feedback and ideas from staff are welcome.
- Avoid any messages that could appear negative or insensitive to smokers.
- Ensure that all employees understand the health rationale for the policy: Research shows unequivocally that secondhand smoke is a significant health risk; medical authorities agree that all workplaces should be completely smokefree; and ventilation systems cannot remove all of the toxic chemicals and gases from the air.

- Ensure that managers and supervisors know what is expected of them and are prepared to implement the policy.
- Be sure to communicate the timeline for implementation of the policy.
- Promote company-supported smoking cessation counseling and treatment opportunities, beginning one to three months in advance of implementation. Employees need time to decide to quit smoking. They also need to know from the outset that your company wants to help them quit.
- After the implementation of the policy, thank employees for their support and their efforts to make the smokefree policy a reality.

Choosing the best messengers. The person who delivers a message is often as important as the message itself.

- Include a visible role for senior corporate executives as communicators; it is important for your company to signal the commitment of top management to the new policy.
- Involve other effective messengers. Respected doctors or nurses within your company, union leaders, and charismatic employees who are skilled communicators and committed to the policy all could play an important role.
- If possible, include messages from popular, well-known personalities outside of your company, such as politicians or sports stars committed to smokefree air.

Delivering your messages. Key messages should be delivered repeatedly in advance of the implementation date using all available means of communication.

- For reaching employees, effective delivery methods include email, meetings, trainings, your company's Web site, blogs, newsletters, paystubs, bulletin boards, and signs. Make sure the policy is included in employee orientation materials and job postings.
- For reaching shareholders and the general population, the mass media and your company's annual report can be used to highlight the company's commitment to employee health and well-being.

- For reaching the mass media, consider disseminating press releases and feature articles, holding news conferences and interviews, or holding special events to draw attention to your company's smokefree efforts.
- Special events and promotional activities can be effective ways to deliver key messages. Consider scheduling a special event on implementation day. For example, implementation could be timed to coincide with a national or international no-smoking day, and your company could work with health officials or health groups to host a media event on that day. Your company could also sponsor a health fair on or in advance of implementation day. Other promotional activities could include a poster contest, a countdown until the launch of the policy, or incentives for employees who quit smoking during the first month.

Developing a Timeline. Your communications plan should include a timeline to ensure that appropriate messages are delivered at each stage of the implementation process, beginning approximately four months in advance, if possible, and continuing past the implementation of the policy, as needed.