

COMPANY PROFILES: HOW DID THEY GO SMOKEFREE?

Case Study: The Dow Chemical Company

Company description (from company Web site, www.dow.com)

With annual sales of \$54 billion and 46,000 employees worldwide, Dow is a diversified chemical company that combines the power of science and technology with the “Human Element” to constantly improve what is essential to human progress. The Company delivers a broad range of products and services to customers in around 160 countries, connecting chemistry and innovation with the principles of sustainability to help provide everything from fresh water, food, and pharmaceuticals to paints, packaging, and personal care products. For more information, visit www.dow.com.

Motivation to go smokefree

As part of its commitment to employee health and wellness, Dow established a smokefree policy at its North American locations over 15 years ago. The Dow planning team intentionally anchored the decision to implement a smokefree policy with existing corporate policies and priorities and with the expectations of supporting good health and delivering shareholder value. The smokefree policy was aligned with the company’s global Environment, Health, and Safety Policy (to support the protection of individuals from adverse health impacts) and local safety policies (which prohibited smoking for safety reasons).

Smokefree policy

In 2003, Dow’s Health Services and Human Resources departments updated the policy in response to the increasing evidence related to the adverse health effects of secondhand smoke.

The new policy involved two parts:

- 1) Extending its North American smokefree policy to Dow property and meetings, including outdoor areas, and implementing a tobacco-free policy at Dow Health Services facilities (e.g., fitness centers)
- 2) Implementing a smokefree buildings and meetings policy globally (Designated outside smoking areas would still be allowed.)

Dow spent approximately 18 months planning for the implementation of the new policy. The policy was introduced like any other companywide policy; a clear plan was put in place, deadlines were set, and each step of implementation was approved and documented by the appropriate personnel. A review of local practices and gaps was completed, and tools such as a geographic implementation checklist were provided to aid each region in local implementation. A comprehensive communications plan was also developed and implemented, and customized messages were created for various stakeholders – management, Human Resources, union representatives, employees – and disseminated through the full range of communication vehicles. Opportunities and support for

employee tobacco cessation were also provided well in advance of the policy start date to help encourage tobacco-free lifestyles and ease the transition to the policy. After the rollout of the policy, local adjustments were made as needed. The policy was also incorporated into Dow's quality assurance and audit processes.

Results achieved

Employee tobacco cessation rates, which are tracked as part of Dow's health assessment program, have improved since the implementation of the policy. Dow's global rate of tobacco use is currently 18 percent. By 2014, Dow aims to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use in each of its geographic regions by 10 percentage points.

Obstacles faced

1. Geography-specific challenges

To implement the policy in Germany and the Netherlands, Dow needed approval from the "works councils," or representative employee groups, which created a layer of bureaucracy and led to implementation delays. A key point to take away is to understand the full scope of the decision-makers and to allow adequate time in the implementation plan for extra communication and decision-making. It is also essential to have strong evidence to support the policy recommendations, understand the minimum requirements of the policy, and be open to some flexibility (or more time for implementation) in some areas.

Some sites in the Asia Pacific region have also proved challenging given the high rates of tobacco use and the lack of cessation expertise, services, and medication/nicotine replacement therapy availability. Dow is working with regional health services staff to increase their skills and self-efficacy in addressing tobacco use in both individual counseling and population-based health promotion. Customizing communication materials to be consistent with local resources is important to make them more useful and more credible. In some places, additional resources are allocated to the implementation of local tobacco cessation programs.

2. Lack of understanding of global needs and resources

Extensive research was required to understand the cultural aspects of tobacco use and the cessation options available to Dow's global employee population. At Dow, a global tobacco cessation subject matter expert relies on input from regional contacts around the world to ensure that policy, clinical guidelines, and resources are consistent with known best practices, drive progress, and allow for local flexibility where necessary.

3. Lack of transparency

It can be difficult to assess how effectively the policy is being implemented in more remote locations.

- Dow's tobacco policy is listed, by worksite, on the employee benefit Web site as part of the company's commitment to and pride in offering a healthy workplace.

- Including messaging about Dow's tobacco-free workplace policy as part of the company-wide No Tobacco Day and in the company's sustainability goals encourages grassroots inquiries if local practice deviates from the global expectation.
- Making the policy part of the company audit process and keeping tobacco on the topic list for health-related site visits and update meetings helps to identify (potential) changes in the policy.

Lessons learned

- Do your research. Understand the cessation opportunities available at your global locations and their local laws/customs regarding tobacco use.
- Be able to provide the rationale and business case for implementing a tobacco-free worksite. Ensure that your employees realize that the decision to go tobacco-free is not arbitrary or punitive. Not only is employee health important to the company, but tobacco use results in reduced productivity and increased health risks, both of which affect the company's bottom line.
- Recognize that quitting tobacco use is an emotional and personal issue for people – and that it can be hard work. Be supportive of your employees' quitting efforts, but be sure in your communications and plans that non-tobacco users do not feel punished or unappreciated because they do not use tobacco.
- Consider the greater community. There may be opportunities to take advantage of tobacco control successes within your community – for example, the passage of smokefree legislation – to generate momentum for your tobacco-free workplace policy. By the same token, it may be possible to create changes in tobacco control policy in your community by implementing a tobacco-free policy at your workplace. Suppose there is a small community where there are only two major employers. Consider meeting with the other large employer to discuss whether they would be interested in implementing a smokefree policy at the same time.
- Reinforce the policy via constant communications and monitoring. Reinforcing the policy and monitoring its implementation will help ensure that the policy becomes part of the company's culture and that all new employees and contractors understand it as a mandatory company policy. Recognize that you need consistent support to help employees and family members quit, that relapse is possible, and the desire to quit may come well after the policy launch. Hold tobacco cessation campaigns at regular intervals year after year – not only when the tobacco-free policy is implemented.

- Keep thinking about how to get to your end goal of a tobacco-free environment. Dow No Tobacco Day takes place every May in conjunction with World No Tobacco Day. It is an opportunity for the company to reinforce the tobacco-free message and to encourage people to think about quitting tobacco use. The event also includes site-specific challenges to provide a supportive environment of no-tobacco use (e.g., sites in Japan close their outside smoking huts for at least the day).
- Reward worksites that take action to create a tobacco-free workplace. Dow has a Healthy Workplace Index, which is an internal tool to measure and encourage sites to create a supportive environment (and culture) that encourages employees to practice healthy behaviors. "Smoke-free workplace" is one indicator in this index, and worksites receive a higher score on that measure if they do not have designated smoking areas.
- Consider implementing a policy that covers all forms of tobacco. One unexpected, negative outcome of the smoke-free policy was a probable increase in smokeless tobacco use among employees. Dow has since increased efforts to inform its employees about the health consequences of smokeless tobacco and dispel the myth that smokeless tobacco is a safe alternative to cigarettes. Dow has also reframed its goal as a tobacco-free workplace as opposed to a smokefree workplace and consistently uses tobacco (vs. smoking) use/cessation in its messaging.