

New Jersey**Secondhand Smoke Exposure in Atlantic City Casinos****Public Health Problem**

On April 15, 2006, New Jersey implemented one of the nation's most comprehensive laws to protect its population from the dangers of exposure to secondhand smoke. Although the law applied to the vast majority of New Jersey worksites (including all restaurants and bars), a few significant exemptions existed. The most notable of these exemptions was for the gaming areas of the state's casinos located in Atlantic City. Utilizing evidence collected and evaluated by experts over the past several years from across the country, advocates, working in concert with the state Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program (CTCP), began to address and remove the casino exemption throughout FY 2007.

The need to close this loophole is clear when one considers that, in 2006 more than 44,500 people were employed by Atlantic City's casinos—making these employees the largest group of indoor workers in the state not completely protected from exposure to secondhand smoke. Advocates felt strongly that these employees deserved the same protection as all other workers in New Jersey.

Program Example

OSH provided technical assistance and training that enabled CTCP to effectively develop rules for implementing the law and to conduct data-collection activities. Concurrently, advocates such as the Atlantic County Smoke-Free Coalition, New Jersey Group Against Smoking Pollution, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, and individuals such as Vincent Rennich (a 25-year veteran of the casino industry) were actively educating casino employees and operators about the need for smoke-free environments. OSH staff actively monitored these initiatives and provided resources and linkages as needed to aid local efforts. To reinforce the education campaigns, these same organizations also worked with the Atlantic City Council state lawmakers to adopt state or local regulations to further restrict smoking on the exempted casino gaming floors.

Implications and Impact

These 2007 advocacy efforts resulted in two significant successes. The New Jersey State Senate introduced a bill early in the current legislative cycle to completely ban smoking in casinos. While this bill is still being considered, the Atlantic City Council has adopted a policy that requires casinos to restrict smoking to just 25% of their gaming floors. The combination of this local policy (made possible by CTCP's education efforts that resulted in the removal of preemptive language from the state smoke-free workplace law) and the advocacy efforts of local groups have been important contributors to the decisions made by 7 of the 11 Atlantic City casinos to completely ban smoking on their gaming floors, thereby protecting thousands of employees from exposure to secondhand smoke. While more work is still needed, this is a significant step in changing the perceived social norm of smoking in New Jersey casinos as well as in Nevada, Louisiana, Mississippi, and in locations across the country with both Native American and nonnative-owned gaming establishments.