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TOXIC INDOOR AIR POLLUTION LEVELS DROP 87% AFTER CLEAN INDOOR AIR LAW

Before & After tests assess indoor air quality at New Mexico restaurants, bars and pool halls

Albuquerque (November 14, 2007) – On the 31st anniversary of the Great American Smoke Out, New Mexicans are breathing easier than ever thanks to the Dee Johnson Clean Indoor Air Act, the statewide smoke-free law. The law requires the vast majority of New Mexico workplaces, including restaurants and bars, to be smoke-free indoors. Indoor air quality testing conducted at twelve of New Mexico’s hospitality venues showed an 87 percent drop in toxic pollutant levels since the Dee Johnson Clean Indoor Air Act went into effect June 15, 2007.

Before implementation of the New Mexico smoke-free air law, all venues were heavily polluted with fine particulate air pollution and cancer-causing chemicals, according to Dr. Andrew Hyland, one of the researchers who conducted the before and after smoking-ban study. Locations allowing indoor smoking were significantly more polluted than indoor smoke-free sites and than outdoor air in New Mexico, with levels of pollution in excess of EPA standards. As a result of the law, air quality is dramatically improved for workers and patrons in New Mexico hospitality venues. Dr. Hyland is a scientist at the Roswell Park Cancer Institute, the national leader in the effects of secondhand smoke on indoor air quality.

Using state-of-the-art air pollution monitors, a total of 12 bars, restaurants, and pool halls were visited both before and after the June 15, 2007 implementation of the New Mexico law prohibiting smoking in indoor public places. The pre-law visits were made in June 2007. Post-law visits were made in July and August, 2007.

The study measured concentrations of particulate matter in the air smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM_{2.5}). These tiny particles are released in significant amounts from burning cigarettes and are easily inhaled deeply into the lungs. They may be carcinogenic (known to cause cancer) themselves or carry carcinogens on their surfaces. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established guidelines for safe levels of PM_{2.5} microns per cubic meter. High concentrations of these pollutants are found in secondhand smoke, which causes 35,000 Americans to die from heart disease every year and has been known to cause lung cancer, heart disease, chronic lung ailments and low birth weights. Studies have shown that even 30 minutes of secondhand smoke exposure compromised the function of coronary arteries of non-smokers in a way that was indistinguishable from smokers.

“This study demonstrates conclusively that the Dee Johnson Clean Indoor Air Act is working to protect the health of New Mexico hospitality workers and patrons who were previously endangered by secondhand smoke pollution,” said Nathan Bush of the American Cancer Society.

“This is valid, scientific proof that the air quality at New Mexico’s restaurant, bars, and pool halls was unacceptable for hospitality employees prior to this important law, ” said Representative Al Park, sponsor of the Act. “The Dee Johnson Clean Indoor Air Act’s ban on smoking in all workplaces is well justified. This law has always been about protecting people’s health.”

“We’ve heard from so many people who say they can breathe easier, they don’t cough, their eyes don’t water and they feel so much better now,” said Cynthia Serna, Director of New Mexicans Concerned About Tobacco. “Knowing how harmful their environment was before the smoking ban, this makes it clear that we did the right thing.”

How Before & After Testing was Conducted

Researchers spent a minimum of 30 minutes in each venue. The number of people inside the venue and the number of burning cigarettes were recorded every 15 minutes during sampling. These observations were averaged over the time inside the venue to determine the average number of people on the premises and the average number of burning cigarettes. A TSI SidePak AM510 Personal Aerosol Monitor was used to unobtrusively sample and record the levels of respirable suspended particles in the air. The room dimensions and hence the volume of each of the venues was also measured and calculated. A full copy of the study is available by visiting the “Learning Center” at www.SmokeFreeNM.com.

Helping Smokers Quit and Businesses Implement the Law

Smoke-free policies have been proven to help smokers quit and the New Mexico Department of Health’s 1-800-QUIT-NOW bilingual helpline is ready to provide smokers with free help. Calls to the Quit line have dramatically increased since the smoking ban was signed into law. Nearly 400 calls – a more than three-fold increase – came into the help line during the week of the law’s implementation and call volume has stayed at higher than usual average since that time. 1-800-QUIT-NOW offers free cessation services and nicotine replacement therapy for anyone who calls.

In addition to the help line for smokers, free materials including signs, table tents, coasters and a brochure that explains how to implement the law are available at www.SmokeFreeNM.com. Also a toll-free number, 1-877-473-6624, is also available to provide information and resources to business owners.

New Mexicans Concerned About Tobacco (NMCAT) was established in 1997 as a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations concerned about the health effects of tobacco on the people in our communities. Members include the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, the New Mexico Medical Society and a network of over 2,500 grassroots advocates. The focus of NMCAT’s efforts is to support policies that will reduce tobacco use.

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