

Why should we interfere with people's "off-time" activity?

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Tobacco use will affect people in all aspects of their lives, health and lifestyle. Nicotine addiction spills over into work time effectiveness and productivity.

Consider the following:

- Nicotine withdrawal symptoms in the workplace produce employee discomfort and reduce focus and productivity between smoke breaks
- Factors associated with smoking contribute to increased costs for employers due to absenteeism, workers' compensation claims, early disability or illness and decreased productivity. Employee morale and corporate image may be compromised
- Smoking is a significant contributor to many common causes of short- and long-term disability. Non-smokers recover faster than smokers from disability. Eliminating smoking decreased disability time by two and a half years for men and almost two years for women (PACT Guide, 2nd ed)
- Smoking prevalence is highest among the 20 to 44 age group therefore achieving smoking cessation in this age group in particular will generate short- and long-term economic benefits to employers
- Most employees who smoke are not happy with their smoking and the majority (70 per cent) would like to quit. Almost half of all smokers will make a quit attempt in any given year (Health Canada, 2008)

Workplaces can take steps to enhance effectiveness, increase productivity and improve the health of their staff by offering medically proven tobacco cessation supports.

Is this going to cost money?

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Many companies are now realizing how inexpensive it is to offer employees a variety of cessation options compared to costs incurred from employees who continue to smoke.

Workplace cessation benefits can result in net cost savings within a few years. A three to eight dollar return on a one dollar investment in health promotion programs can be gained within five years (Kunyk et al, 2008).

Consider the following:

- Paying for tobacco cessation treatments is the single most cost-effective health insurance benefit that can be provided to employees (Centres for Disease Control). Nicotine replacement therapy is not covered by most health plans due to its over-the-counter status but provides almost immediate relief of nicotine withdrawal symptoms. Medications such as Zyban and Varenicline can increase quitting success by two to four times (Pipe et al 2007)
- Employees who smoke add a substantial burden to workplace productivity even when smoking does not occur in the workplace. The Conference Board of Canada indicates it costs employers \$3,396 per year more to employ someone who smokes
- Employers estimate that typically smokers waste 30 to 40 minutes per day on smoke breaks. With enclosed workplace bans are in effect, causing smokers to leave the office for a smoke, productivity losses escalate (Stats Can, Health Report, 2007)
- Employees who smoke are absent from work seven to 10 more days per year than non-smokers
- Productivity losses are triple that of the direct health care costs (\$4.4 billion versus \$1.6 billion dollars) and account for the largest share of the total economic costs related to tobacco (Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion, 2006)

Tobacco addiction is highly treatable and the benefits of cessation far outweigh the challenges and costs that may be encountered. The health cost savings from smoking cessation therapies are substantial and exceed the cost of pharmacotherapy interventions.

Why do we need anything beyond the Smoke-Free Ontario Act?

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The Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA) bans smoking in enclosed workplaces and work vehicles BUT does not address most entrances and exits or outdoor property.

Consider the following:

Company image

- Customers, clients and staff entering or exiting your building are exposed to second-hand smoke and cigarette butt litter
- Staff smoking in huddles outside are visible to the public and may be a negative impact on the company's professional image
- Cigarette butts are the number one litter item found in North America and a source of toxic chemicals entering into the ground

Productivity and costs

- Staff cigarette breaks (often every one to two hours) start to add up and are a significant loss to productivity
- It costs employers \$3,396 per year more to employ someone who smokes

Staff health and well being

- Second-hand smoke drifting into the building through windows and air intake systems are risk factors for common, work acquired musculoskeletal and neurological conditions
- Third-hand smoke, the invisible toxic brew of gases and particles clinging to smokers' hair and clothing, is what one smells on a smoker and poses a cancer risk for anyone who comes into contact with them
- Tobacco-use causes more death and disability than injuries from workplace environments
- Smoke breaks are disruptive and may be viewed as unfair by fellow workers. For non-smoking workers, having to smell cigarette smoke may cause them to feel unwell

A workplace may adopt a smoke-free grounds policy alone or in combination with additional interventions to support employees who are looking for help to quit smoking.