



American Heart Association | American Stroke Association

Learn and Live.

Heart Disease and Stroke. You're the Cure.

Good morning, Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee. The American Heart Association strongly supports SB 245, An Act Concerning Smoking In Public Places, legislation that will extend the smoking ban to workplaces with one or more employees. Currently, Connecticut's smoking in workplace statute applies to Connecticut businesses with five or more employees, preventing roughly 75,000 current workers from working in a smokefree, healthy workplace.

American Heart Association research indicates that the limitation of nonsmoker exposure to second hand smoke will directly reduce incidents of cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in Connecticut, and in the United States. It accounts for more than 930,000 deaths each year in the United States, including an estimated 37,000 to 40,000 heart disease deaths caused by secondhand smoke.

Secondhand smoke has long been associated with heart disease due to tobacco's overall effect on the cardiovascular system. Research has shown that five minutes of exposure to secondhand smoke stiffens the aorta as much as smoking a single cigarette. Twenty minutes of breathing secondhand smoke at levels similar to those measured in bars activates blood platelets involved in the clotting process as much as it does in pack-a-day smokers. These activated platelets increase the chances of heart attack or stroke. In the short term, activated platelets are more likely to form a blood clot in the blood stream. If this clot blocks an artery in the heart, it causes a heart attack. In the brain, it causes a stroke.

Breathing secondhand smoke also can speed up your heart rate while, at the same time, reducing "heart rate variability" — small, random variations in heartbeat. Reductions in heart rate variability signal problems in the nervous system's control of the heart, increasing the chance of an irregular heart beat (arrhythmia) that can itself be fatal or trigger a heart attack. All of these effects not only increase the long-term risks of developing heart disease, but also increase the immediate risk of heart attack. And if someone suffers a heart attack while breathing secondhand smoke, it will likely be worse. Secondhand smoke also causes wheezing, asthma attacks and other respiratory symptoms, and burning eyes, nose and throat. These effects, if caused by any industrial pollutant, would warrant strong corrective action.

A compelling study completed in Helena, Montana found that hospital admissions for heart attacks in this city fell by 40% during the six months that a smoke-free workplaces law was implemented. After the law was reversed, the number quickly returned to its former level. Similar findings have more recently been replicated in Pueblo, Colorado where the incidence of heart attacks fell by 27% in that community after the implementation of their smoke-free workplaces regulation.

The need to protect Connecticut citizens has never been more apparent. SB 245 seeks to protect all Connecticut's workforce not just businesses with more than five employees. No one should be forced to bargain away their health in return for their financial survival. I thank you for your time and attention.

Submitted by,
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American Heart Association, serving Connecticut