

## **Smoke-Free Outdoor Recreation Policy Solutions to Support Health and the Environment**

*“leaders from both the public health and park and recreation fields make compelling arguments that custodians of our green spaces, trails and greenways, recreation facilities, community centers, and playgrounds hold the keys to our most widely accessible dispensary of national health solutions...”*

Maureen Hannan - “5 Key Trends in Parks and Public Health”; *Parks and Recreation Magazine*,  
11-01-2012

### **The Problems - Secondhand Smoke, Role Models and Litter**

#### **Secondhand Smoke (SHS) Affects Everyone**

SHS is among the top causes of preventable death in the US. Even brief exposure can be harmful. Cellular level damage and tissue inflammation occurs immediately and repeated exposure weakens the body’s ability to heal the damage<sup>1,2</sup> The volume of evidence showing that secondhand smoke causes serious illness and death is *massive, conclusive, and indisputable*. Levels of **secondhand smoke exposure outdoors** can reach levels attained indoors depending on direction and amount of wind and number and proximity of smokers. Drifting tobacco smoke, even outdoors, can trigger asthmatic attacks, cardiovascular health issues, bronchial infections, and other serious health problems in nonsmokers. Even for people without such respiratory conditions, breathing drifting tobacco smoke can be deadly<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Role Models**

Young people who see smoking in public places are more likely to consider smoking to be socially acceptable and ‘normal’<sup>7</sup>. Conversely, smoking restrictions reduce youths’ positive attitudes towards smoking and likely reduce the number who experiment with and become addicted to tobacco<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Cigarette Butts - Litter, Fire Hazards**

It is estimated that over two billion cigarette butts are discarded every day worldwide, and that Americans alone discard more than 175 million pounds of cigarette butts every year. Cigarette filters, made of plastic cellulose acetate, take approximately 15 years to decompose<sup>5</sup>. **Discarded cigarettes are a major fire hazard**, threatening outdoor parks, forest land, and recreation areas, as well as wooden structures in parks and playgrounds.<sup>6</sup>

### **Trends in Smoke-Free Outdoor Recreation**

As of April 1, 2014, there are more than 920 municipal and county laws making various outdoor recreation areas smoke-free across the nation. These areas can include sports fields/stadia, parks, open space, bike/ped trails, playgrounds, pools, golf courses, beaches, etc. New York City, Philadelphia, Durham County (North Carolina), Salt Lake County (Utah), and Cook County (Ill) are a few of the well-known US communities with smoke-free outdoor recreation laws. In Colorado there are 16 communities which have passed local laws prohibiting smoking in parks, playgrounds and/or other outdoor recreation areas. Arvada’s law is currently the most comprehensive, including all areas in the list, above.

Arvada  
Avon  
Boulder  
Colorado Springs  
Commerce City  
Denver

Dillon  
Eagle County  
Edgewater  
Golden  
Grand Junction

Lakewood  
Las Animas County  
Snowmass Village  
Steamboat Springs  
Timnath

## E-cigarettes and Marijuana Vaporizers

Because E-cigarettes do not emit a “harmless vapor”, people exposed to passive vaporizing are exposed to nicotine and other chemicals.<sup>5</sup> Marijuana vaporizers can look and operate similar to nicotine vaporizers. Manufacturers promote their ability to hide the odor of marijuana and ability to deliver very potent forms of marijuana. Many e-cigarettes can be retrofitted to vaporize marijuana.<sup>6</sup> Communities and states outside of Colorado have also prohibited the use of nicotine and marijuana vaporizing devices in areas designated as smoke-free. Edgewater was one of the first communities to prohibit e-cigarette and marijuana vaporizing in places currently protected by their local smoke-free law.

## Smoke-Free Outdoor Recreation - A Best Practice Solution

### Smoke-free Policies Are Effective

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Institute of Medicine, Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization recommend the adoption of comprehensive smoke-free laws, including covering certain outdoor areas.

The CDC’s Community Preventive Services Task Force further recommends smoking bans and restrictions, based on *strong evidence* of effectiveness. Studies show positive health outcomes of smoke-free policies including:

- ✓ Reducing exposure to secondhand smoke and tobacco use by youth and adults
- ✓ Increasing the number of tobacco users who quit
- ✓ Reducing tobacco-related morbidity and mortality, including acute cardiovascular events

Economic evidence indicates that smoke-free policies can reduce healthcare costs substantially. Furthermore, evidence shows smoke-free policies do not have an adverse economic impact on communities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013).

Adequate signage and public information help to make smoke-free laws mostly self-enforcing. Tri-County Health Department is able to offer assistance with information campaigns and signage through grant funding for tobacco prevention.

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## References

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