

NEWS

FROM CONGRESSMAN

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TRAFICANT CHAIRS HEARING ON LEGISLATION TO BAN SMOKING IN FEDERAL BUILDINGS

Washington, D.C. – U. S. Rep. James A. Traficant, Jr. (D--Ohio), Chairman of the House Public Works and Transportation Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds, today chaired a hearing on legislation he has introduced to ban smoking in all federally owned and leased buildings. "It is apparent that the focus of the smoking issue has moved away from a simple 'smoker vs. non-smoker' rights issue to the arena of general public health, public accountability and liability," declared Chairman Traficant in his opening statement.

Chairman Traficant's bill, H.R. 881, would ban all smoking in federally owned and leased office buildings, including buildings used by the U.S. House and Senate, as well the U.S. Courts. Under the bill, anyone in a federal building who wishes to smoke must go outside. The Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds has jurisdiction over Federal buildings. "This subcommittee," said Traficant, "is particularly concerned about exercising appropriate oversight on health and safety issues as they relate to federal workers in federally-controlled space. A recent Environmental Protection Agency report and other scientific studies addressing the hazards of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) -- commonly known as secondhand smoke -- has caused the subcommittee to re-examine its oversight role in ensuring a healthy workplace."

Chairman Traficant referred to the fact that ETS has been classified by the EPA as a Group A carcinogen, a classification reserved for those compounds known to cause cancer in humans, such as asbestos, benzene and radon. In a December 1992 report entitled "Respiratory Health Effects of Passive Smoking: Lung Cancer and Other Disorders," the EPA concluded that the widespread exposure to ETS presents a serious and substantial public health impact, and is responsible for some 3,000 lung cancer deaths a year in non-smokers.

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In light of the scientific evidence regarding exposure to ETS, "the subcommittee has re-evaluated its responsibility to provide healthy, safe buildings -- not only to the federal worker -- but also to the American public who use federal office buildings for business, information, advice, meetings, retail and commerce endeavors. The fact is, in most federal buildings, including the Capitol complex, indoor air is recirculated throughout the building -- exposing non-smokers to a known carcinogen," asserted Traficant.

Chairman Traficant referred to official statements made to the subcommittee last month by the General Services Administrations that air filters in federal buildings are incapable of eliminating the microscopic materials contained in ETS. The GSA also stated that establishing separately ventilated smoking areas would cost the federal government as much as \$50 a square foot -- not including the annual cost of operating and maintaining the equipment.

Chairman Traficant noted that total smoking bans have been implemented in the White House, the states of California, Idaho, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio and Utah, as well as numerous municipalities such as Denver, Sacramento and Houston. National food chains, such as McDonald's have implemented smoking bans in some of their restaurants. The Chairman also noted that some federal agencies have already implemented a total smoking ban, including the Health and Human Services Hubert Humphrey Building, the National Institutes of Health and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

"In addition, this subcommittee must be ever conscious of the significant costs associated with space alterations which would be required to accommodate alternative solutions. The subcommittee must also weigh the issue of future liability costs to the federal government if action is not taken now to address the problems posed by exposure to ETS," concluded Chairman Traficant.

Those who testified before the subcommittee today included Dr. Antonia C. Novello, Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service; U.S. Representatives Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Romano Mazzoli (D-KY); William H. Farland, Director of the EPA's Office of Health and Environmental Assessment -- the office that classified ETS as a Group A carcinogen; Gerald Thacker, Acting Commissioner of the Public Building Service; Patricia Lattimore, Acting Director of the Office of Personnel Management; Dr. Alfred Munzer, President of the American Lung Association; Dr. John W. Hoyt, Chairman of Critical Care Medicine at the St. Frances Medical Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Mark W. Hurwitz, Executive Vice President of the Building Owners and Managers Association International.