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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE
11030 Ables Lane, Dallas, TX 75229, 214/243-2272, Fax: 214/484-2720

STATEMENT
OF THE
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION
OF THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON THE
LEGISLATION TO LIMIT OR BAN SMOKING ON COMMERCIAL AIRLINES
JUNE 22, 1989

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AIRPORT SMOKING SURVEY

As President-elect of the American Association for Respiratory Care, a 27,000 member professional organization comprised of respiratory care practitioners across the country, I welcome the opportunity to testify before the House Aviation Sub-Committee. I am here today to present the findings of the public opinion poll recently conducted by members of our association. We believe the results present undeniable public support for a continuation of the current smoking ban on airline flights of two hours or less.

Respiratory care is a health care specialty performed under qualified medical direction for the assessment, treatment, management, diagnostic evaluation, and care of patients with deficiencies, abnormalities, and diseases of the cardiopulmonary system. Respiratory care practitioners see first-hand the devastating effects of cigarette smoking on their patients with emphysema, asthma, bronchitis, and other debilitating and chronic pulmonary diseases. We are, therefore, dedicated to the Surgeon General's goal of a Smoke-Free Society by the Year 2000.

We can only echo, in the strongest possible terms, what the medical community, led by the Surgeon General, states: that cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in this country. To that end, the AARC has committed much of its time and resources to support federal, state and local efforts in educating the public about tobacco use. As an advocate of good respiratory health, the AARC works to educate its patients and the public about the habits and hazards affecting their lung health. Many of our public health efforts have centered around the issue of indoor air pollution and, specifically, cabin air quality. We first testified on this issue in 1986 to the National Academy of Science. A critical step toward the goal of a smoke-free society

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was set in motion two years ago with the passage of the ban on cigarette smoking on airline flights of two hours or less. Unless extended by Congress, the smoking ban will expire next April. The AARC is committed to doing all it can to, at a minimum, make permanent the two-hour ban. We have undeniable evidence, from both smokers and non-smokers, that the public supports this ban and would welcome a permanent ban. We believe that members of Congress should have this public attitude data as they deliberate a legislative continuance of the ban.

This past April, the AARC mobilized its members to collect data from airline passengers. Volunteers from the AARC conducted the airport public opinion poll from April 23-29 at 66 airports in 33 states. We surveyed 27,677 individuals in an attempt to identify what they thought about the current two-hour ban. We had a volunteer state coordinator contact each airport surveyed for permission to position volunteer surveyors in the airport. Furthermore, volunteers were instructed not to identify the association affiliation as that might bias the results.

This is actually the second poll we have conducted. In 1987, AARC volunteers went to airports across the country and asked the members of the flying public their opinions on airline smoking. At that time we surveyed over 33,000 people. While the results of the 1989 survey are dramatic on their own, changes in public attitude since the 1987 survey are convincing evidence that the public at large, but specifically, the smoking public, accepts and approves of smoke-free flights.

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Of the 27,677 people polled, 84.0% approve of the current ban, 12.2% do not approve, and 3.8% had no opinion. This is an increase in approval for a ban of nearly 20% since 1987. This fact alone proves that wide public support exists and that Congress should act to continue a smoking ban on airline flights. A comparison of the two surveys follows:

Do you approve of a ban?

1987 SURVEY

<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>NO ANSWER</u>
21,383	9,286	2,573
64.3%	27.9%	7.7%

1989 SURVEY

<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>NO OPINION</u>
23,249	3,377	1,051
84.0%	12.2%	3.8%

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Of those polled, 81.1% indicated they would favor a permanent ban under the current two-hour flight guidelines. This includes 91.1% of non-smokers and 51.7% of smokers

ALL RESPONSES

<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>NO OPINION</u>
22,446	4,069	1,162
81.1%	14.7%	4.2%

SMOKERS

3,506	2,916	359
51.7%	43.0%	5.3%

NON-SMOKERS

18,911	1,142	705
91.1%	5.5%	3.4%

Of those people surveyed, 62.7% said they thought the ban should be extended to all flights. A majority of respondents believe all airline flights, regardless of length, should be smoke-free. Nearly 80% of non-smokers and 43% of smokers who approve of the current ban approve of this.

Of the respondents who indicated they smoke cigarettes, 58.1% approve of the current ban and 51.7% would favor a permanent ban under the current guidelines.

In 1987, only 30% of smokers favored a ban of smoking on all commercial flights. Today, with the experience of flying on some smoke-free flights, smokers are more accepting of a ban. Their attitudinal change in two years is the most dramatic - nearly a doubling of approval within this group.

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Of those surveyed, 24.5% were smokers, 75.0% were non-smokers (.5 did not answer the question). This corresponds with both the recent Gallup Poll which shows 27% of the adult population are smokers and the Surgeon General's Report, which indicates that in 1987, 29% of the public were smokers.

CONCLUSION

The AARC made every attempt to ensure this poll was free of bias. Airport patrons were approached at random, and our volunteers were asked not to divulge their organizational affiliation if at all possible. We do not extrapolate these findings to the public at large. None-the-less, we believe this fairly represents public attitude on smoking and flying. To our knowledge, there has been no other survey of this magnitude, and we believe this is the largest public opinion survey on airline smoking.

The overwhelming response (84%) of the flying public is to make the two-hour ban permanent. Of the 24% of respondents who identified themselves as smokers, 58.1% approved of the current ban. Furthermore, a majority of respondents (62.7%) approved of a smoking ban on all domestic flights.

This attitudinal research, coupled with the overwhelming evidence of the adverse effects of smoking on health and the mounting data on the negative effects of second-hand smoke, points to only one answer: a ban of smoking on all domestic flights must be instituted. In our culture today, smokers are well-prepared to suspend their habit for periods of time - in theaters, in smoke-free workplaces, in other social and professional settings where smoking is not permitted. This is only an inevitable next step in the preservation of our nation's health.

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We urge the members of Congress to make the right choice - the choice for the health and welfare of the public - as they deliberate the fate of the smoking ban of flights of two hours or less.

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