



Health Policy

STEVENS BILL WOULD LIMIT TOBACCO USE TO CERTAIN AREAS OF FEDERAL BUILDINGS

He says he enjoys a good cigar and on occasion has been known to smoke a pipe. But Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) also says it's time to establish a policy on smoking in federal buildings that will benefit non-smoking federal employees as well as members of the public.

A hearing on the bill will be held on July 30 before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Civil Service, Post Office, and General Services, which Stevens chairs.

The bill would instruct the operators of federal buildings serving all three branches of government to develop rules allowing smoking in designated areas only. The rules would be issued within 180 days of enactment. Violations would be punishable by a fine of not more than \$500.

Stevens said his bill is patterned after a nonsmokers' rights law enacted in Alaska. Stevens also said four states and about 30 local jurisdictions have enacted smoking restrictions that extend to the workplace. In Minnesota, in 1985, legislation was enacted to prohibit smoking in most places outside bars, private homes and one-person offices, unless the area was posted as permissible to smoke in.

In Connecticut, a law enacted in 1983 told businesses employing 50 or more persons to develop and post rules on smoking in the workplace, although it did not prescribe what the rules should be. And in Suffolk County, New York, east of New York City, smoking was banned in hallways, rest rooms and other indoor public places.

Stevens also cited the cost implications of health problems related to smoking, including "passive" inhalation of ambient smoke.

Stevens acknowledged, however, that fully one-third of all adult Americans smoke, including many federal workers. He said this wide usage and the addicting nature of tobacco make it unrealistic to try to ban smoking from federal buildings entirely. "But it is time to take the initiative, and to take preventing action rather than reactive," he declared.

Tracking Workplace Smoking Policies

Meanwhile, research commissioned by the tobacco industry's trade association, the Tobacco Institute, asserts that a so-called "widely-reported trend" toward restrictive workplace smoking policies in large corporations is not as widespread as it may appear.

This conclusion was announced recently by Dr. Lewis Solmon, dean of the Graduate School of Education at the University of California at Los Angeles and president of Human Resources Policy Corporation (HRPC), a social science and economic research firm.

Survey respondents were corporations from the *Fortune* 1000 list of service and industrial companies and from *Inc.* magazine's list of the 100 fastest growing corporations in the U.S.

Only 32 percent of the 445 respondents reported that some type of smoking policy is in effect at the workplace. The most common ones prohibit certain employees from smoking while working or restrict smoking by employees holding certain jobs, the survey found. Employees most likely to be restricted from smoking are those working with dangerous substances, sensitive machinery, or food.

"Common Courtesy" Urged

The survey also found that almost one-fourth of the respondents had rejected workplace smoking policies. Reasons given include rejection of the policy by employees, the employees' ability to handle workplace smoking problems on their own, and the belief that a ban on smoking would harm employee morale.

A majority of the survey respondents encourage employees to settle disagreements about smoking at the workplace through "common courtesy." Moreover, about 40 percent of the respondents said they do not modify the work environment to accommodate nonsmokers.

"Companies will provide adequate ventilation, post signs or even rearrange certain work areas to accommodate nonsmokers. But few are willing to construct new partitions or to segregate smokers from nonsmokers," according to a summary of the survey results.

Job applicants who smoke do not appear to be discriminated against in favor of nonsmokers. According to the survey report, 99 percent of the respondents have no policy prohibiting the hiring of smokers, and 81 percent of the respondents do not ask whether a job applicant smokes.

Workplace smoking policies are more likely attributed to longstanding "realities and dangers in the workplace" than to no-smoking legislation, the survey said. "This is demonstrated by the fact that industries most likely to have had a policy for over five years are food (48.3 percent), pharmaceuticals (35.7 percent), and chemicals (31.8 percent). And 39.9 percent of companies where there are hazardous materials or sensitive machinery have had smoking policies for over five years," according to the survey.

"[L]egislation mandating workplace smoking restrictions is not necessary," Solmon said. "This survey shows that companies can and do regulate smoking as circumstances warrant."

Solmon attributed the push for no-smoking legislation to a "small but vocal group that wants to ban smoking in the workplace."

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