

HEALTH BY NUMBERS

Rhode Island
Department of Health
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Workplace Smoking Policies of Rhode Island Employers

Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) in the workplace is of growing concern to both employees and public health officials. The Rhode Island Workplace Smoking Pollution Control Act of 1986 requires all private Rhode Island businesses to maintain, ie, implement and enforce, a workplace smoking policy for their employees. Recently, the Rhode Island Department of Health, Office of Environmental Health Risk Assessment, conducted a telephone survey of Rhode Island businesses to obtain data on existing workplace smoking policies.

Ninety-three businesses were selected randomly from publications produced by the Rhode Island Department of Economic Development,¹ and they were contacted by telephone using a standard survey protocol. The most knowledgeable respondent at each business was asked whether the business had a smoking policy, and if so, was asked to briefly describe the policy. When written policies were available, the questioner requested them and compared information obtained in the telephone interview with written policies. Discrepancies between the two were found to be minimal and were resolved in favor of written policies.

Smoking policies were categorized in the following manner: "smoke-free" (no smoking allowed anywhere on indoor company property), "restrictive" (smoking allowed only in a section of the workplace cafeteria, in private offices with the door shut, or in

designated lounges or rooms), "less restrictive" (smoking allowed in areas permitted by a "restrictive" policy, and in any of the following areas: corridors, conference rooms, rest rooms, and/or stairwells), "least restrictive" (smoking not restricted beyond the extent to which there is a conflict between nonsmoker and smoker where management must become involved in the dispute), and "no policy" (smoking issues are not addressed either officially or unofficially by management).

Of the 93 facilities contacted, 26% had "smoke-free" policies, 37% were "restrictive," 15% were "less restrictive," 13% were "least restrictive," and 10% had "no policy" (Figure 1).

In comparison to national rates, . . . Rhode Island businesses reported a similar rate of smoking policies.

Analysis of the results by business category indicated that manufacturing facilities generally had less restrictive policies than non-manufacturers. Only 12% of the manufacturing firms surveyed reported "smoke-free" policies, as compared to 33% of non-manufacturing firms. The data for the remaining policies were similar for manufacturing and non-manufacturing firms, except that manufacturing firms were more likely to have no

policy (15% vs 6% respectively) (Figure 2).

Business size was also observed to impact policy types. "Smoke-free" policies were most common in businesses with fewer than 49 employees (49%), as compared to 24% for firms with 50 to 99 employees and 18% for firms with 100 or more employees (Figure 3).

In comparison to national rates, the surveyed Rhode Island businesses reported a similar rate of smoking policies in place compared to the rest of the country. A 1991 Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) survey reports an 85% policy rate for the nation, while the Rhode Island businesses reported a rate of 89%. However, only 26% of the Rhode Island firms contacted in the study reported having completely "smoke-free" workplaces, while the national rate according to the BNA is 34% (Figure 4).

References

- ¹ Rhode Island Directory of Manufacturers. Rhode Island Department of Economic Development, January 1991. Companies Employing 50 to 200 Employees. Rhode Island Department of Economic Development, November 1991. Rhode Island Business Firms with 100 or More Employees. Rhode Island Department of Economic Development, February 1991.
- ² "SHRM-BNA Survey No. 55, Smoking in the Workplace: 1991." Bulletin to Management, BNA Policy and Practice Series. Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., Washington DC, August 1991.

Submitted by the Office of Environmental Health Risk Assessment, Rhode Island Department of Health; Dana K. Hanson, Intern; Robert R. Vanderslice, PhD, Toxicologist, Beia T. Mayas, MD, MPH, Chief. Health by Numbers is edited by Jay S. Buechner, PhD, and William J. Waters, Jr, PhD.

Figure 1. Smoking Policies of Rhode Island Employers (93 facilities contacted)

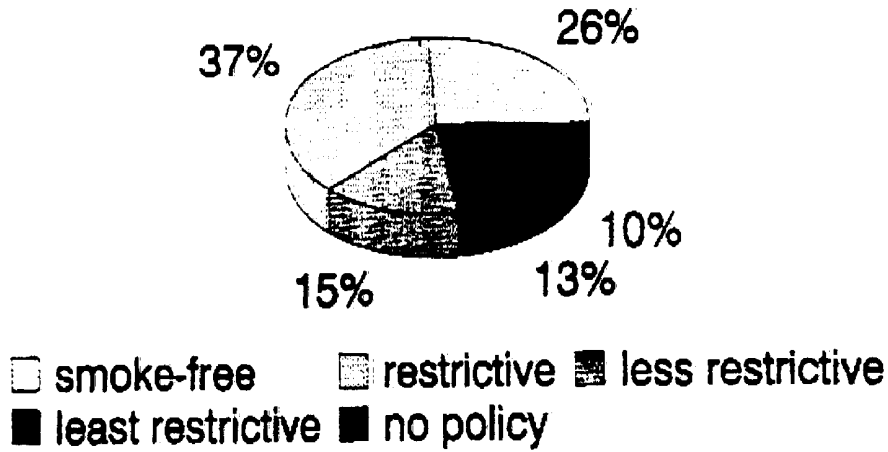


Figure 2. Smoking Policy Breakdown by Business Category (total of 93 facilities contacted)

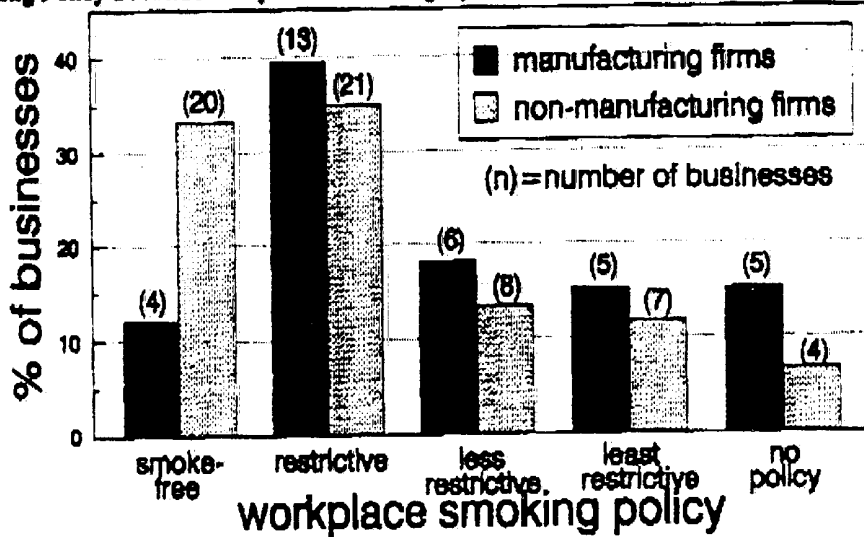


Figure 3. Policy Breakdowns by Business Size (total of 93 facilities contacted)

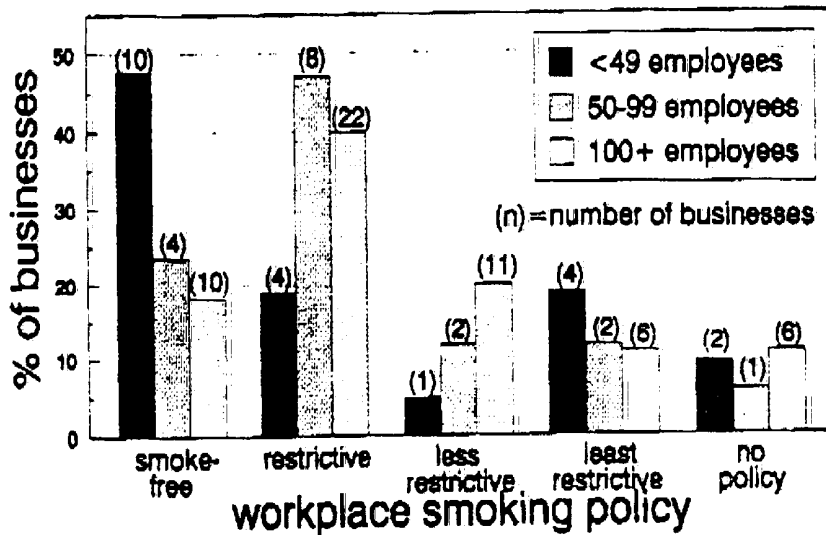
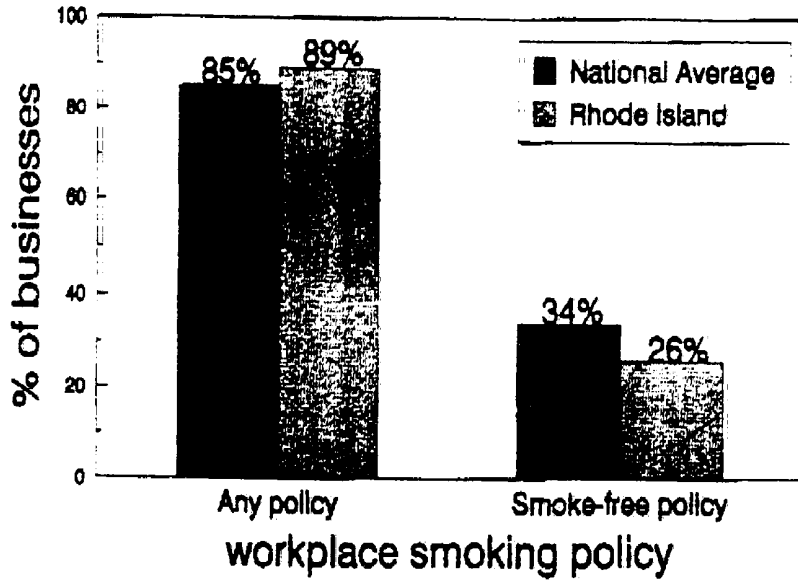


Figure 4. National Comparison of Smoking Policies (data from the Bureau of National Affairs)



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