New research finds smoking, secondhand smoke declines in Minnesota

This month ClearWay Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Health released a new Minnesota Adult Tobacco Survey (MATS) – the most thorough and accurate source of information about tobacco use in Minnesota. The MATS survey found that Minnesota’s adult smoking rate has declined to 16.1 percent – down from 22.1 percent in 1999. In addition, exposure to secondhand smoke significantly declined after the Freedom to Breathe Act was implemented in October 2007.

However, the report identified areas for improvement as well. Currently, 625,000 Minnesotans continue to smoke, and the MATS study also found a striking increase in the use of smokeless tobacco products, such as snuff and snus. The number of smokers who reported using smokeless tobacco in addition to cigarettes more than doubled since 2007, from 4.4 percent to 9.6 percent – suggesting that the tobacco industry’s recent push to market these products is working.

Other findings include:

- A new low of 45.6 percent of Minnesotans reported exposure to secondhand smoke in any location, down 11 percentage points from the 2007 MATS report.
- 87.2 percent of all Minnesotans have gone smoke-free in their homes – up from 83.2 percent in 2007.
- The majority of smokers want to quit and more are getting help. More than half (54.6 percent) of adult Minnesota smokers attempted to quit in the past year. There was also a significant increase in the number of smokers asked by a health care provider if they smoke.
- Smokers are smoking fewer cigarettes per day. The average number of cigarettes smoked per day dropped 5.2 percent from 2007 to 2010.


![National vs. Minnesota adult smoking rate](chart.png)

Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ClearWayMinnesota and www.facebook.com/quitplan
The harm tobacco causes people in Minnesota is often addressed with statistics: 625,000 smokers, 5,000 deaths per year, nearly $3 billion spent annually on health care costs. But a new documentary coproduced by ClearWay Minnesota and Twin Cities Public Television (tpt) puts a face on the real Minnesotans behind the numbers.

*Tobacco Addiction: The Unfiltered Truth* shares the stories of Minnesotans who have real-life experience with tobacco addiction. By telling their stories in their own words, the participants revealed their individual journeys as smokers, often learning about themselves in the process.

Although from very different backgrounds and walks of life, the participants found they had much in common. Many of them describe using tobacco casually at first, then becoming aware of growing physical and psychological dependence. Several said they came to view cigarettes as their “best friend.”

While many people were interviewed for the program, four individuals provided stories that were so in-depth and compelling that they became the cornerstone of the project. Their stories included insights and deep emotions. Their contributions are a reminder of how the fight against tobacco is ultimately about people – and of how high the stakes are. Tragically, during the making of the film, participant Pamela Gold was diagnosed with lung cancer, and in July of 2010 she passed away.

*Tobacco Addiction: The Unfiltered Truth* began airing on tpt’s Minnesota Channel in October. DVD copies and a toolkit for using the documentary in your community are available from the ClearWay Minnesota office. The program can also be viewed at www.weallpaytheprice.com.

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**$5,000 QuitCash Challenge” prize motivates longtime smokers to kick butt**

A New Hope man quit smoking after nearly 20 years to win the $5,000 grand prize in QUITPLAN Services’ third annual QuitCash Challenge. Kevin Fischer, 45, was one of more than 3,100 Minnesotans who entered the annual quit-smoking contest, kicking tobacco for the month of October – and for a chance to win.

QUITPLAN Services celebrated Kevin’s accomplishment and presented him with a check for $5,000 on Wednesday, November 17, the day before the 35th annual Great American Smokeout.

Kevin overcame his addiction to tobacco with help from QUITPLAN Services, working with a counselor to create a personalized plan to quit. Quitting was not easy, but having a plan helped Kevin stay on track and stay quit. In addition to counseling support, Kevin also turned to the QUITPLAN Services Facebook page (facebook.com/quitplan) to connect with other quitters for encouragement and to learn useful tips for staying quit during the contest.

Other prizes were awarded to contest participants as well. The first runner-up and winner of a 40-inch HDTV and a $500 GameStop gift card was Denise Heaton of Lino Lakes.

Now in its third year, The QuitCash Challenge saw a 65 percent increase in registrants from 2009, with 3,122 Minnesotans representing all areas of the state joining the contest.

QUITPLAN Services was launched in 2001. It offers all Minnesotans year-round, free access to quit-smoking counseling and can also provide individuals with nicotine patches, gum or lozenges. Visit quitplan.com or call 1-888-354-PLAN (7526) to learn more.
On December 6 and 7, the Minnesota Department of Health hosted a conference for Minnesota’s public health community. The theme was *Shifting Into High Gear: The Next Decade of Tobacco Control*, and health advocates from around the state gathered to share information, network and hear presentations by experts from around the country.

A keynote address was given by Dr. Lawrence Deyton, director of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Tobacco Products. In 2009, Congress passed and President Obama signed a new law allowing the FDA to regulate tobacco products, and Dr. Deyton is the inaugural director of the new tobacco division. Since the law took effect, provisions like bans on misleading terms like “light” on tobacco packaging have been phased in; Dr. Deyton discussed these and answered questions from conference participants.

Other speakers included April Roeseler, the head of California’s successful tobacco prevention media program, and M. Jane Lewis, curator of Trinkets & Trash, a program that monitors tobacco advertising practices. Distinguished Minnesota researchers also participated in a panel discussion.

ClearWay Minnesota was represented at the conference by Chief Executive Officer David Willoughby, who spoke on Minnesota’s ongoing tobacco control journey, and by Senior Public Affairs Manager Kerri Gordon, who gave a preview of the 2011 Legislative session.

In December, ClearWay Minnesota launched a new television ad that reminds people of the true cost of smoking in our state. The ad depicts several families as they receive news from doctors about loved ones suffering from tobacco-related illness.

The campaign also features new bus side and banner advertising that takes aim at the tobacco industry. The stark photography and headlines suggest the unfeeling approach of tobacco companies toward the customers they have hooked on a dangerous, highly addictive product.

The tobacco industry continues to spend almost $200 million each year in Minnesota to attract new, young customers to replace the more than 5,000 who die each year from tobacco-related disease. The new ads can be viewed online at weallpaytheprice.com.

**Profiles of Minnesota tobacco control leaders:**

**Herb Sam**

Traditional healer Herb Sam provides ClearWay Minnesota with counsel on our Tribal Tobacco Education and Policy project on the Mille Lacs reservation. Herb is well known and very active as a healer and spiritual advisor in Minnesota’s American Indian communities. In 2010, he was asked to be a Chaplain of the Day for the Minnesota Legislature.

Herb strongly advocates for the traditional, sacred use of tobacco, as opposed to corrupted forms of tobacco use like the smoking of commercial cigarettes, which not only injure one’s health, but that of others through secondhand smoke. Herb suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD), which he attributes to being around smokers.

Herb uses his experience to educate children about what smoking can do to their health. Herb shares his message with young people through singing and playing traditional songs on the drum. Not only does his approach teach young people about health, it also communicates a traditional way of life and the true meaning of being Anishinaabe.
Thoughts from the Chair

Any of us who enjoy restaurants and bars in Minnesota know the effects of the Freedom to Breathe Act, passed and signed into law in 2007. It restricted smoking in these establishments, a “clearing of the air” now supported by more than 77 percent of Minnesotans, according to recent polls. Other recent studies clearly show that the law has had no effect on employment among Minnesota restaurants or bars as a whole – meaning there has been no net job loss in the industry – and that our younger citizens are finding that smoking has become more inconvenient, and may not be worth the effort. In short, the effect of the Freedom to Breathe Act has meant healthier, smoke-free environments for all of us, where we can work and be entertained without risking exposure to the proven health effects of secondhand smoke.

Yet in January of this year, a handful of lawmakers introduced bills in the Minnesota House and Senate to repeal the Freedom to Breathe Act. Since its passage four years ago, we have seen several attempts to weaken the law, but this new challenge is the most aggressive attack to date. And now we need your help.

Some media reports have characterized this new bill as merely creating an exemption for bars, but the bill is written far more broadly than this and would allow smoking in any bar – as well as any restaurant – that serves alcohol. Make no mistake, in reality this bill is a repeal.

The merits of the Freedom to Breathe Act were publicly and vigorously debated at the Legislature four years ago, and what was true then remains true now. Mountains of evidence have proven the inherent dangers of secondhand smoke exposure, and research from our own state shows how smoke-free policies improve worker health. As the media have covered the issue this month, we’ve seen many hospitality servers and managers – those most affected by this issue – come forward to say they don’t want things to go back to the way they were, and most Minnesotans agree with them.

We know public opinion is on our side, and many lawmakers have told us they will work to protect the law. But this threat is very real. The Legislature has many new members who were not involved in the original debate – and the law’s opponents are already organizing, circulating petitions and asking citizens to contact legislators.

As of this writing, the bills (House File 188 and Senate File 168) are moving through the committee process, and we urge you to make your voice heard as well. Please, contact your elected representatives. Let them know that you care about the health of Minnesota bar and restaurant workers and patrons, and that you oppose these bills. Repealing Freedom to Breathe would turn back the clock, undo the great progress we’ve made in reducing tobacco’s harm in Minnesota, and bring smoke back into our lives – and lungs – at our favorite hospitality venues.

Sincerely,

David F. Fisher
ClearWay Minnesota® Board Chair