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1 Year Later, 75% of Wisconsinites Support the Smoke-free Air Law

Majority say the law has made going out to bars and restaurants more enjoyable

Madison, Wis., June 30, 2011—The state's smoke-free air law is more popular now than ever before, according to a new poll released Thursday. The poll, conducted by the nationally recognized polling firm Public Opinion Strategies, found 75 percent of people support or strongly support the law, up from 69 percent in 2008 when the legislature was still debating the issue.

What's more, fully 64 percent say the law has made going out to bars and restaurants more enjoyable while an overwhelming 91 percent say they go out to eat and drink the same or more often now that the state is smoke-free.

The smoke-free air law is also popular across the political spectrum with 66% of Republicans, 74% of Democrats and 80% of independents supporting it.

Wisconsin implemented its law July 5, 2010.

"People in Wisconsin waited a long time for this law. It's great that they so clearly support it and are willing to support their favorite bars and restaurants through the change," said Maureen Busalacchi, Executive Director of SmokeFree Wisconsin. "Even better, is the fact employees are enjoying improved health because of the law."

Earlier this year the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee released a study comparing bartender health before and after the smoke-free air law took effect and found a substantial reduction in the percentage of bartenders who reported smoking-related respiratory health symptoms including, wheezing, shortness of breath, coughing and sore throats after the state went smoke-free.

The UW Milwaukee survey also found an overwhelming 72 percent of bartenders support the smoke-free law.

Similarly, a University of Wisconsin Madison study showed a 92 percent reduction in harmful indoor air pollutants inside bars and restaurants in the two months after going smoke-free. These "small particulate" pollutants are known to lodge deep into lung tissue and artery walls triggering asthma and contributing to heart disease and lung cancer, according to the study.

"I love it" said Bunnie Johnson, 62, a bartender and waitress at the now smoke-free Tippy Toe Inn in rural Vernon County. Johnson, who suffers from mild asthma, says the law has greatly improved her health.

“I used to cough half the day away. Now I almost never cough and I’m never sick. It’s made a big difference,” said Johnson.

Experiences like Johnson’s contribute to the overwhelming 85 percent of poll respondents who believe secondhand smoke is a serious health hazard and the 75 percent that say having smoke-free bars and restaurants is important.

Seventy-eight percent also believe the law is working well.

According to the latest compliance figures from the Department of Health Services, less than one percent of businesses have been reported for violating the law.

An economic analysis comparing five Wisconsin cities that had smoke-free ordinances before the state law to those without found no economic impact from being smoke-free. In fact, virtually every smoke-free community reported an increase in the number of Class B alcohol licenses after the ordinances took effect and employment remained strong despite the recession.

“Keeping people healthy and at work or able to go out with friends after work, benefits everyone,” said Gail Sumi, Wisconsin Government Relations Director for the American Cancer Society. “Clearly Wisconsin’s year old smoke-free law is working well and will continue to protect public health for years to come.”

Twenty-nine states have passed similar comprehensive smoke-free air laws including bars and restaurants.

The survey of 500 Wisconsin voters was conducted June 15 and 16th and has a margin of error of +/- 4 points. The poll was commissioned by SmokeFree Wisconsin, the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association and the American Lung Association.

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Statewide Smoke-free Air Highlights:

- 75% of Wisconsin voters surveyed say they support the statewide smoke-free air law
- 91% say they go out the same or more often now that bars and restaurants are smoke-free
- 64% of respondents go out to bars or restaurants at least once a week
- 85% agree that secondhand smoke is a serious health hazard
- 85% believe having smoke-free bars and restaurants is important
- 78% say the law is working well
- 66% of Republicans, 74% of Democrats and 80% of Independents support the law

The full poll can be viewed at: <http://bit.ly/1yrsmokefreepoll>

A video of bar owners across the state sharing their thoughts about the law can be seen at: <http://bit.ly/smokefreebars>