

Why Tobacco-Free Schools?

Values and Benefits of Tobacco-Free Schools

◆ Provides positive role modeling by adult employees and visitors

The idea that tobacco use is socially accepted by others, including respected adults, encourages acceptance of ongoing use of tobacco products. Enactment of a tobacco-free school policy represents a firm commitment by school administration, teachers, and parents to prohibit tobacco use by students, employees and visitors. Enforcement of the tobacco-free policy confirms the commitment and provides genuine opportunities for adults and peers to serve as role models for no-tobacco-use.

◆ Reduces children's observation of tobacco use and takes a firm stand against it

Adult attitudes towards tobacco use and adult tobacco use behaviors can perpetuate the perception of acceptance. Studies have found that parental permissiveness – parents not taking a strong stand against their kids using tobacco products – has been identified as a key factor in teen initiation and use. School administrators often express frustration with the lack of parental support for no-tobacco-use. School policies that include information about the importance of positive adult role modeling in their rationale can provide administrators with support for policy change.

◆ Supports (rather than confounds) prevention messages delivered in classrooms by sending clear, consistent non-use messages

Tobacco use prevention education is considered an essential element of comprehensive school health programs. Resistance skills are often taught to help children learn to resist offers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Coaches of athletic teams regularly prohibit tobacco use by team members. School hallways and bulletin boards often display prevention messages. How then are children to understand stepping outside their classrooms to view clusters of students and/or teachers using tobacco on school grounds? Schools that are not tobacco-free send conflicting

messages to students about tobacco use.

◆ **Provides safe environment for students by reducing exposure to environmental tobacco smoke**

Children become the involuntary victims of environmental tobacco smoke indoors and outdoors. Where smoking is allowed indoors, only floor-to-ceiling enclosure and a separate ventilation system can keep the gases and particulate matter in smoke from migrating. Simple separation is not effective. Smoking outside near building entrances or fresh air intakes often results in migration of smoke indoors. Clusters of students, employees or visitors, smoking at entrances and smoking at school sponsored events, can make it difficult for students who do not wish to have smoke on their clothes and in their hair. Passing through the smoking area may trigger an asthma attack or exacerbate respiratory problems in students. This does not meet the standard of a safe environment.

◆ **Protects children from a dangerous drug. Tobacco use is not just a "bad habit;" it is a powerful addiction**

The Food and Drug Administration has classified nicotine, found in tobacco products, as a drug. School policies do not allow the use of other drugs, such as alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine on school grounds and at school sponsored events. Why should an exception be made for nicotine and tobacco?

◆ **Complies with Federal Legislation prohibiting smoking inside school buildings**

The Pro Children Act of 1994 states the following. "No person shall permit smoking within any indoor facility utilized for services to kindergarten, elementary, or secondary education or library services to children." Also included are children's services for routine health care or day care or early childhood development. This applies to all schools and programs that are funded by the Federal Government or through State and local Government by Federal grant, loan, and loan guarantee or contract programs.

◆ **Does not contradict state law on smoking in public places**

Federal law requires that, if they are to remain eligible for federal funding, school districts must ban smoking in their 'indoor facilities.' However, the law specifically allows states to have more restrictive laws. Thus, a school district's complete ban on smoking should not jeopardize its federal funding.

North Carolina law prevents units of state or local government from banning smoking in most public places, including their own buildings. However, the law does not apply to a 'primary or secondary school...except for a teacher's lounge.' Therefore, since federal law will not allow indoor smoking without violating North Carolina law, smoking may be banned at school.

In August of 2003, the North Carolina General Assembly amended its legal requirements regarding the use of tobacco products on school grounds and at school sponsored events. The new Tobacco-free Schools Law (G.S. 143-601) points out clearly that no other law on tobacco use, such as G.S. 143-595 through G.S. 143-601 (Smoking in Public Places) can prevent a local board of education from adopting and enforcing a more restrictive policy on the use of tobacco in school buildings and school facilities, on school campuses, at school related or school sponsored events, and in or on other school property.

◆ **Models respect for state laws designed to limit access to tobacco by children**

In 1997 North Carolina Legislature amended the existing state law prohibiting the sale and distribution of tobacco products to people under age 18. The new provisions became effective December 1, 1997. Schools can uphold the intent of the law to limit youth access to tobacco products by crafting policies that prohibit tobacco use by students, employees and visitors at all times, in all school buildings, on all school grounds, and at all school sponsored events. Additionally, schools can consistently enforce tobacco use policies and can confiscate tobacco products and paraphernalia brought to school.

◆ **Prepares students for the reality of smoke-free workplaces and communities**

Employers are becoming more reluctant to hire smokers, due to increased absenteeism, health care costs and disability. In a competitive job market and nonsmoking community environment, it is important that all students leave their school years without a smoking handicap. Additionally, special attention should be paid to alternative schools that are sometimes exempt from tobacco-free policies or practices. Students who can least afford to be disadvantaged in the job market because

they smoke, frequently attend these schools.

◆ **Proactively protects schools from unnecessary risk of future liability by prohibiting smoking on school premises**

Litigation related to tobacco addiction and exposure to environmental tobacco smoke is growing. Individuals have recovered damages in lawsuits because their employers failed to provide a safe, smoke-free work environment. With the rise in the number of children with asthma, there may be more cause for concern, particularly if an asthma attack or other respiratory problems are triggered because a child is exposed to tobacco smoke in a school setting.

◆ **Reduces the risk of fires due to "smoking materials"**

"Smoking material" fires are the leading cause of fire deaths in the U.S. "Smoking materials" refer only to lighted tobacco products, not to matches or lighters. According to the National Fire Protection Association, there were more than 150,000 smoking material fires in the U.S. in 1995. These fires resulted in almost 4,000 deaths and injuries and \$507 million in direct property damage. More people die in fires caused by lighted tobacco products than any other type of fire in the U.S. Lighted cigarettes can be easily tossed into school trash cans, especially in bathrooms, placing schools and school children at increased risk of injury due to "smoking material" fires.