

news**buzz**

Smoking deaths decline in Milwaukee

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Fewer people are smoking and dying from the habit in Milwaukee County than just four years ago, according to the latest tobacco study released by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

The study says about a fifth of the state's smokers live in the county – about 171,000 of the state's 915,000 puffers. But that's a decrease from the 2006 study, which estimated there were about a million smokers in the state and 200,000 in the county.



The number of deaths in the county attributed to smoking also declined. In 2006, annual deaths “directly related to smoking” were estimated at 1,357. This year, “The Burden of Tobacco in Wisconsin,” a joint study by the state health department, American Cancer Society and University of Wisconsin, said yearly deaths had dropped to about 1,232.

In Milwaukee County, 79 percent of the lung cancer deaths were caused by smoking, according to the report. As for deaths caused by respiratory illness, 57 percent were attributed to smoking. Only 15 percent of deaths from cardiovascular disease, however, were deemed to be the result of smoking.

The statewide health care costs of smoking were pegged at \$2.8 billion. The county's chunk of that was \$474 million. The cost of lost productivity was estimated at \$1.7 billion statewide and \$292 million in the county.

In Milwaukee County, hospital stays were the biggest expense (\$260 million), followed by ambulance bills (\$94 million), prescription drugs (\$63 million) and nursing homes (\$36 million). County residents spent a grand total of \$299 million on almost 73 million packs of cigarettes in 2008. By comparison, in 2004, county residents bought almost 77 million packs.

Drawing on the federal data, the study claims that “approximately 15 percent of all deaths in Milwaukee County are directly attributable to smoking.”

The report blames secondhand smoke with causing about 57 lung cancer deaths, 674 heart disease deaths and 7 sudden infant death syndrome cases in the county every year. House fires caused by cigarettes kill an average of 13 a year.

Proponents of the state’s ban on smoking in workplaces, which takes effect July 5, say it will drive down illness and death caused by secondhand smoke. Milwaukee’s Community Advocates Public Policy Institute calls the smoke “a serious health hazard proven to cause premature death and disease in non-smoking adults.”