



COMMUNITY ADVOCATES
Public Policy Institute

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:

• Jason Brame
(Jasonb@communityadvocates.net)
(414) 270-2951

• David Riemer (DRiemerMil@yahoo.com)
(414) 270-2943

SMOKING'S ANNUAL TOLL ON MILWAUKEE: 730 DEAD, \$500 PER PERSON IN HEALTH CARE COSTS

Advocates Expect July 5 Smoke-Free Workplace Ban to Improve Local Public Health

Milwaukee (June 14, 2010)—Milwaukee suffers 730 smoking-related deaths each year, a full 15 percent of the city's deaths overall, according to the 2010 Burden of Tobacco Report recently released by the American Cancer Society and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

Tobacco continues to be the single greatest cause of preventable deaths in the state: more than 7,700 die in Wisconsin each year due to tobacco use, and secondhand smoke is estimated to cause about 57 lung cancer deaths, 674 deaths from ischemic heart disease, and seven infant deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

What's more, smoking-related health care costs totaled \$300 million in Milwaukee in 2007, or \$498 for every man, woman and child. These costs include prescription drugs, ambulatory care, and care in nursing homes and hospitals. The cost of productivity lost in Milwaukee from 2003-07 due to smoking such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and cancer totaled \$174 million.

On July 5, Wisconsin's smoke-free workplace law goes into effect, prohibiting smoking in all workplaces, including all bars, restaurants, bowling centers and hotels. In addition to reducing the primary effects of smoking, the smoke-free workplace law will likewise curb the effects of secondhand smoke, a serious health hazard proven to cause premature death and disease in nonsmoking adults, including increased risk for lung cancer, heart disease and serious respiratory illness.

Health care advocates anticipate noticeable improvements in certain public health categories such as heart attack rates. A landmark 2009 report by the Institute of Medicine that compiled data from studies around the world showed dramatic reductions in heart attack rates in the first year following smoke-free law implementation, ranging from 6-47 percent.

—more—

Smoking Toll on Milwaukee / Add One

“From premature death to exorbitant health care costs to lost work productivity, smoking and tobacco use continue to impose a terrible toll on Milwaukeeans of all ages and income levels,” said David R. Riemer, Director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute. “Tobacco-related sicknesses and deaths are wholly preventable, and strong anti-smoking laws and investment in tobacco prevention have been shown not only to dramatically curb smoking rates but also to increase the public health. The smoke-free workplace law is good for Milwaukee and good for Milwaukee’s public health.”

Smoking Rates in Decline, But Still High

According to the Burden of Tobacco report, 23.8 percent of Milwaukee adults—nearly 103,000 people—are smokers, topping the state’s rate of 19.5 percent of adults who smoke. In addition, 20.7 percent of Milwaukee high school students smoke, equaling figures across the state, and an estimated 13 percent of pregnant women smoked cigarettes in Milwaukee.

Statewide, 915,379 people continue to smoke cigarettes, including nearly 65,000 youth.

Since the inception of Wisconsin’s tobacco control program in 2001, smoking rates in Wisconsin have substantially declined. Youth smoking has been cut in half from 37 percent to 17 percent and last year the state’s adult smoking rate hit an all-time low of 19 percent, according to the American Cancer Society.

However, the Wisconsin Legislature cut tobacco control funding by more than half in the last budget, bringing funding to a record low of roughly \$7 million year—a fraction of what the Centers for Disease Control estimates is necessary to effectively reduce tobacco use in the state.

According to Riemer, while the smoke-free workplace law is a positive step, it will take more work and more money to continue to combat tobacco’s harmful effects.

“While the new law extends protection from secondhand smoke to virtually every worker in every workplace—some tobacco bars and tobacco retailers are excluded—a single law can only do so much to combat a health problem this substantial and widespread,” said Riemer. “Comprehensive tobacco programs are needed now more than ever to prevent young people from starting to smoke and help smokers to quit.”

The Burden of Tobacco in Wisconsin report uses data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, among other sources. To download the report, visit www.medsch.wisc.edu/mep/

The 2010 Burden of Tobacco Report is a collaboration of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services-Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, University of Wisconsin Carbone Cancer Center, and the American Cancer Society. For more information on the report contact Karen Palmersheim, Director of the University of Wisconsin Tobacco Surveillance and Evaluation Program, at (608) 262-2825.

Community Advocates’ Public Policy Institute has clear and simple goals: To explain why so many Milwaukeeans are poor, and to develop and implement a practical strategy to reduce poverty throughout Wisconsin.