

ANSWERS AND RESPONSES TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Capital District
Tobacco-Free Coalition



Throughout the implementation process, employees or visitors may raise questions regarding your tobacco-free policy, and the responses below will assist you and your staff in providing simple, appropriate answers.

Q: Why is the company going tobacco-free?

A: The tobacco-free policy is intended to provide a healthy, respectful environment for employees, visitors, and vendors. Tobacco use, smoking and exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke are significant health hazards. Under the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Guidelines, secondhand smoke is a Group A carcinogen (cancer-causing agent), known to cause heart disease, cancer, respiratory issues and irritation of the eyes and nose. A tobacco-free environment is also a more supportive environment for people who want to or have already made the choice to quit.

Q: Why does the proposed policy include smokeless tobacco?

A: Smokeless tobacco spit is considered a biohazard and contains at least 24 carcinogenic chemicals, creating a health and safety risk for maintenance staff. A tobacco-free policy also sends a consistent health message by not implying that smokeless forms of tobacco are safe. There are no safe forms or levels of tobacco use.

Q: Why are e-cigarettes included?

A: Electronic smoking devices are currently unregulated products that have no requirements for ingredient disclosure, accurate labeling or quality control. The aerosol they emit can contain a variety of toxins, including carcinogens, and that's why we support a tobacco-free policy that includes all Electronic Aerosol Delivery Systems (EADS) such as e-cigarettes and vape pens.

Q: Why can't we have smoking huts that are designated outdoor locations?

A: Smoking and secondhand smoke are known health hazards. The best way we can protect visitors and employees from unwanted exposure to secondhand smoke is to prohibit tobacco use on the entire property.

Q: Doesn't this policy punish smokers?

A: Policies that restrict smoking in certain areas, but allow it in others, undermine the goal of preventing unwanted exposure to secondhand smoke. Smoking and secondhand smoke are known health hazards. The best way we can protect visitors and employees from unwanted exposure to secondhand smoke is to prohibit tobacco use on the entire property.

Q: It's my/our right to use tobacco. You can't take away my right to smoke.

A: There is no constitutional right to smoke. A tobacco-free policy does not take away an individual's choice to use tobacco; it simply limits where a person may choose to use it.

Q: How can you justify a policy that oppresses the “minority group” of smokers?

A: Individuals who smoke do represent a minority group in terms of numbers in the U.S. and likely in most workplaces. However, smokers are not a category of people protected under the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. Likewise, smoking is not protected under the Due Process Clause of the Constitution. In addition, it could be argued that the lack of a comprehensive tobacco-free policy oppresses the majority of employees and visitors (those that do not use tobacco) by failing to prevent their exposure to unwanted and toxic secondhand smoke.

Q: Why tobacco use? Why not focus on other major health issues like obesity and diabetes?

A: It’s difficult to identify a health and safety issue that poses a greater threat to health and well-being than tobacco use. Tobacco-related death remains the most preventable cause of death and disease in the U.S. Each year, more than 400,000 people die from tobacco-related causes, more than die from suicide, murder, HIV/AIDS, alcohol use, illegal drug use and motor vehicle crashes combined. Unlike many other health issues, one person’s choice to use tobacco can directly affect the health of others.

Q: There are so many other pollutants in the air from cars, homes, landscaping machinery and power plants – who cares about secondhand smoke? We can’t eliminate pollution, so why bother?

A: The Environmental Protection Agency classified secondhand smoke as a class “A” or “known human” carcinogen. There are only 15 other pollutants that have the Group A designation, including asbestos, radon, and benzene. Of all the Group A carcinogens, only secondhand smoke has actually been shown in studies to cause cancer at typical environmental levels. Secondhand smoke poses a real and preventable health risk which can largely be mitigated by a comprehensive tobacco-free policy.

Q: Am I required to quit using tobacco?

A: No. Our goal is to create a healthier, tobacco-free work environment and we encourage employees who use tobacco products to take advantage of the tobacco cessation programs and aids that we offer. However, employees are not required to quit tobacco use but simply required to comply with the new tobacco-free policy, while on company property.

Q: Where on the campus does the tobacco-free policy apply? Is smoking allowed inside cars?

A: Tobacco use is prohibited on all areas of the campus, inside and outside, including inside private vehicles that are parked on company property. All parking structures and parking lots owned or operated by the company are covered by the tobacco-free policy.

Q: What about the safety of employees and clients who choose to smoke and must go off campus, especially at night?

A: Safety is a concern for everybody, tobacco users and non-users, both on and off work property. Leaving work property to use tobacco products does not put a person at any greater risk than leaving the property for any other reason. Current smokers who are reluctant to leave the property at night for safety reasons can consider the use of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (nicotine patches, gum, or lozenges) to help them manage nicotine cravings.

Q: If an employee has to walk farther to reach a property or location where they can smoke, will they get more break time?

A: No. This would be unfair to co-workers and reduce the effectiveness of our workplace.

Q: Can employees and visitors use nicotine-replacement therapy products like gum, lozenges, or patches on the campus or while at work?

A: Yes. Smokers are encouraged to use these products to make it easier to manage their nicotine cravings while at work and to help them comply with the tobacco-free policy.

Q: Will employees or visitors be able to smoke on public property adjoining the campus?

A: Yes, but it is requested that employees and visitors respect neighbors and their property.

Q: What help can I get to quit?

A: There are many cessation resources available to you.

- Call New York State Smokers' Quitline: 1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487).
- Visit the New York State Smokers' Quitsite: <http://www.nysmokefree.com/>
- Contact "The Butt Stops Here" to find group cessation support and education: 518-459-2550
- Talk to your doctor about medications available to help you quit.
- [Other resources and/or incentives available through employer insurance, EAP, etc.]

Q: What is my responsibility as a supervisor/manager related to the tobacco-free policy?

A: Supervisor/Management responsibilities include:

- Understand and follow the policy yourself.
- Discuss the policy with your supervisees and encourage their questions.
- Enforce the policy uniformly and fairly with all employees as well as visitors and vendors.
- Support your employees' efforts to inform visitors and other employees about the policy, resources and options.
- Review suggested scripts with employees.
- Be respectful of the employees who use tobacco, letting them know about the available resources to help them comply with the policy (tobacco cessation programs, nicotine replacement therapy).

Q: How will the policy be enforced?

A: Our hope is that all employees will work together to enforce this policy through mutual respect and cooperation. Announcements will be made, prominent signage will be posted to raise awareness, and all employees or visitors seen smoking after the policy's launch date will be asked to stop and reminded of the new policy.

Q: What should I do if I see someone smoking on our grounds?

A: Employees who see individuals smoking on workplace grounds are asked to inform these individuals politely about the tobacco-free policy. Individuals who do not feel comfortable approaching someone violating the policy should contact their immediate supervisor or department head. During this transition period, we ask that all employees treat each other with dignity and respect, support each other, and embrace a spirit of having a healthy work environment.

Q: Who should I talk to about questions or concerns that I have about the tobacco-free policy?

A. Your opinion and feedback are very important to us, and we want to help you understand the policy and answer any questions you may have. Questions and feedback about the policy should be directed to _____.