

Smokefree Success Stories: Spotlight on smokefree countries



Ireland's smokefree law has been called a tipping point for global public health.¹ The world's first national law to make all enclosed workplaces 100% smokefree has had effects far beyond Ireland's shores.

Smokefree status	100% smokefree
Smokefree since	March 2004
People protected	4.1 million

On March 29, 2004, the Republic of Ireland became the first country in the world to implement comprehensive smoke-free legislation in all workplaces, including restaurants and pubs, with no allowance for designated smoking rooms, and few exemptions.²

The legislation was a culmination of a decade of lobbying and campaigning. Its introduction has proved to be both successful and popular, with widespread popular support and compliance levels at 95%.³

Background

In January 2003, an independent scientific report on the health effects of secondhand smoke in the workplace was presented to the Minister for Health and Children, Micheál Martin TD. It recommended that legislative measures be required to protect workers from the adverse effects of secondhand smoke exposure.

Following this report, the Minister announced he would make all enclosed workplaces smokefree by January 2004. The primary purpose of this legislation is to protect workers and the general public from exposure to secondhand smoke.

At first there was widespread disbelief that this could be happening in Ireland, where drinking and smoking are a large part of Irish culture. A social and political debate began. Many arguments were presented against the legislation, including potential job losses, issues of smokers' rights, the economic impact on bar trade, and that the legislation would be unworkable and unenforceable. Others proposed designated smoking rooms and ventilation as alternatives.

In June 2003, the Irish Cancer Society, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Ireland, and the Irish Heart Foundation joined forces to create a pro-health lobby group to show support for the Minister's proposal and to react to groups and individuals that opposed the legislation. As the level of opposition from the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA) and hospitality industry grew, support of the pro-health lobby group also grew. Seventeen groups from health organizations and trade unions representing 1.1 million people joined forces to show mass public support for

the legislation. A public opinion survey published by the Office for Tobacco Control in June 2003 showed that 67% of the public of all ages supported the smokefree at work legislation.

A national public information campaign, Smoke-Free at Work, was implemented. The campaign materials included public information leaflets; guidelines for employers and managers; guidance for the licensed trade; and on-line information from the Office of Tobacco Control and Health and Safety Authority (HSA) websites.

On March 29 2004, the complete ban on smoking in the workplace in Ireland came into effect. Journalists and TV crews from all over the world descended on Dublin that morning. Along with Minister Micheál Martin, tobacco control advocates attended Ireland's first smokefree breakfast at a restaurant in a city centre location in Dublin. The day got off to a smooth start with positive media coverage – 'It's working.'

The Smoke-Free Compliance Line became operational on March 29 2004 to coincide with the introduction of the legislation.⁴ The Environmental Health Officers and Health and Safety Officers charged with implementing the ban reported 97% compliance in the first month.

One year after Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2004 was passed, the Office of Tobacco Control conducted a one-year review of the legislation. The results⁵ of the review attest to its success:

- Compliance with the legislation is very high
 - 94% of all workplaces inspected under the National Tobacco Control Inspection Programme were smoke-free
 - 92% of all workplaces inspected by the Health and Safety Authority were smoke-free
 - 93% of all hospitality workplaces inspected were smoke-free
- There is overwhelming support for the smoke-free law among smokers and non-smokers
 - 98% of people believe that workplaces are healthier because of the smoke-free law, including 94% of smokers
 - 96% of people feel that the smoke-free law is a success, including 89% of smokers
 - 93% of people think the smoke-free law is a good idea, including 80% of smokers
- Air quality in pubs has improved dramatically since the smoke-free law. Levels of carbon monoxide have decreased by 45% in non-smoking bar workers
- 96% of all indoor workers report working in smoke-free environments since the introduction of the smoke-free workplace law

As these figures demonstrate, the law received widespread support from the public and key stakeholders - government and opposition parties, health care organizations, trade unions, public health advocates, and others.⁶ Environmental health officers and health boards were instrumental in building compliance with the legislation and ensuring its effective implementation.⁷

As governments look for hard evidence about the impact of smokefree laws – on health, on the economy, on public opinion – the Irish example shows that 100% smokefree legislation works. The law has been an unqualified success, in spite of considerable opposition from the tobacco industry and others. Perhaps the most important message from Ireland is that political leadership can make a real difference to health.

¹ Koh, HK, Joossens LX, Connolly GN (2007). Making smoking history worldwide. *New England Journal of Medicine* 356(15):1496-8.

² Fong GT, Hyland A, Borland R et al (2006). Reductions in tobacco smoke pollution and increases in support for smoke-free public places following the implementation of comprehensive smoke-free workplace legislation in the Republic of Ireland: findings from the ITC Ireland/UK Survey. *Tobacco Control* 15 (Suppl. 3): iii51-58.

³ Global Smokefree Partnership. Smokefree in Action: Success Stories – Ireland. Norma Cronin. Available at: <http://www.globalsmokefreepartnership.org/evidence.php?id=20>. Accessed 10.31.2007

⁴ <http://www.otc.ie/>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Koh HK, Joossens LX, Connolly GN (2007). Making smoking history worldwide. *New England Journal of Medicine* 356(15)1496-8.

⁷ Office of Tobacco Control (2005). *Smoke-free workplaces in Ireland: A one-year review*. Clane, Ireland: Office of Tobacco Control.