



**North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Public Affairs**

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One Year In, N.C. Smoke-Free Law Is Successfully Reducing Exposure to Secondhand Smoke

RALEIGH – At its one-year anniversary, North Carolina's smoke-free restaurants and bars law has successfully reduced worker and patron exposure to secondhand smoke. An air quality study by the N.C. Division of Public Health shows that air quality in restaurants and bars around the state has improved by 89 percent since the law went into effect January 2, 2010. See [Air Quality Graph here](#).

"The law is protecting North Carolinians from the health hazards of secondhand smoke, and that will have a lasting impact on the health of our citizens," State Health Director Jeff Engel, M.D. said. "Secondhand smoke has been linked to heart disease, cancer, respiratory infections and asthma."

The Surgeon General's Report released earlier this month emphasizes the harmful effects of secondhand smoke, reporting that even short-term exposure to tobacco smoke can cause changes that can trigger a heart attack or stroke in someone with heart disease or asthma attacks in those with respiratory conditions.

Restaurant and bar workers report improved health since the law went into effect. Robert Nixon, owner of Jackalope Jacks in Charlotte, said his whole staff is healthier. "They aren't sick as much," Nixon said. "And I know I feel better, because I don't inhale smoke anymore."

"I haven't had as many colds or been as congested since the law went into place," said Jackalope Jack's bartender Ben Jackson.

In 2008, according to the N.C. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 7.8 percent of North Carolina adults surveyed said they had been exposed to secondhand smoke at work every day during the past week. For the first nine months of 2010, preliminary data show that only 4.3 percent of North Carolina adults are now exposed to secondhand smoke daily at work since the smoke-free law went into effect.

"Compliance with the law has been excellent, with the vast majority of restaurants, bars and lodging facilities cooperating fully, thanks to the hard work of local health departments around the state," Engel said. "The number of complaints we are receiving now about non-compliance is very small."

By the end of November, the state had received 1,343 complaints involving 874 facilities since the law went into effect on January 2. There were 538 complaints made in January, but only 37 in November, with the monthly number dropping steadily early in the year. View the [monthly chart here](#).

Paul M. Stone, President and CEO of the N.C. Restaurant and Lodging Association, said his membership is pleased with the new law. "The consensus is that this ban has had an overall positive effect on restaurants and hotels in North Carolina," Stone said. "It also has been very well received from the public."

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According to a UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health survey released this summer, 74 percent of N.C. registered voters support the law. In the same survey, 42 percent said they dine out more now that the smoke-free law went into effect, while only 8.3 percent say they dine out less often. Slightly less than 50 percent said it has made no difference in their behavior.

Among bar patrons, 18.4 percent said they are now going out more, 70.7 percent said the law made no difference and 10.7 percent report going out less.

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Resources/additional information:

Smoke Free N.C.

<http://tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov/smokefreenc/>

Chart of monthly statewide number of complaints about compliance with the law.

<http://tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov/smokefreenc/docs/MonthlyOutcomeIndicatorsJan-Nov-12-05-10.pdf>

UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health Survey (Support for Smoke-Free Policies)

http://sru.sph.unc.edu/Round%201%20Cessation%20Release%20for%20SRU%20Website%207_15.pdf

A Report of the Surgeon General: How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease

http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2010/consumer_booklet/index.htm