

TIPS FOR WRITING LETTERS

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You can influence elected officials directly by writing letters to them. You can indirectly let them know what you think, and influence your community, by writing letters to the editor of your local paper. Elected officials read letters to the editor to determine what their constituents think.

Keep the following points in mind when writing a letter:

- **Keep it short** (no more than 1 page). Note: newspapers usually have word count limits on letters to the editor.
- Stick to one main point, and support your position with facts (see "Sample Speaking and Writing Points")
- Write about your personal experience. Explain why you care about protecting all workers from secondhand smoke.
- Be polite.

The points below will help you write a letter to an elected official, or to the editor of your local paper. Remember: make your letter personal. *These are just ideas to help you get started.*

- **Explain why you are writing:**
Example: "I am writing to encourage the city council to take action to eliminate secondhand smoke in public places and workplaces."
- **Explain what the problem is (this is the place to cite facts):**
Example: "Secondhand smoke is a serious problem. Every year, 53,000 Americans die from diseases caused by exposure to secondhand smoke. The Surgeon General, CDC, and National Toxicology Program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have identified secondhand smoke as a cause of cancer, heart disease and other diseases in nonsmokers."
- **Share how you have been personally affected by secondhand smoke:**
Example: "I have been waiting tables for five years. When I started, I was in perfect shape, running three miles a day. Because of my daily exposure to secondhand smoke, I developed chronic asthma. I cannot even walk up a complete flight of stairs without getting out of breath. All workers deserve the right to a safe, 100% smokefree workplace."
- **Explain specifically what you are asking for:**
Example: "I hope that the city council will pass an ordinance requiring that all public places and workplaces to be 100% smokefree."

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Smoke-Free Laws are Good for Workers!

✓ All Employees Have the Right to Breathe Clean, Smoke-Free Air While They Work

- A 2010 Report by the Surgeon General found that tobacco smoke contains a deadly mixture of more than 7,000 chemicals and compounds, of which hundreds are toxic and at least 69 cause cancer.
- Exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace is associated with an increased risk of lung cancer.
- Smoke-free policies are the only effective way to protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke exposure decreases substantially among nonsmoking employees of restaurants and bars (and among nonsmoking adults in the general public) after implementing smoke-free laws.
- Hospitality workers are immediately protected when smoke-free laws take effect. Studies of hospitality workers before and after smoke-free laws show significant reductions in self-reported exposure to secondhand smoke, along with declines in respiratory symptoms.
- Just one month after Minnesota's Freedom to Breathe law went into effect, exposure to a carcinogen from tobacco in a group of nonsmoking hospitality workers fell by 85 percent, and nicotine exposure fell by 83 percent.
- A 2007 American Journal for Public Health study surveyed non-smoking bar and restaurant employees in both smoking and smoke-free establishments in Oregon. Workers in establishments that allowed smoking absorbed a potent tobacco-specific carcinogen when exposed to secondhand smoke. The study also found that levels of this carcinogen increase by an average of 6 percent after every hour of work.
- A 2006 study conducted in Scotland shows smoke-free legislation improved pulmonary function in employees just one month after implementation (JAMA). A more recent study demonstrates improved respiratory health in barmen one year after Ireland's smoke-free law went into effect (American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, 2007).
- Before New York bars and restaurants went smoke free, 88 percent of hospitality workers reported experiencing sensory symptoms (red or irritated eyes, sore or scratchy throat, runny nose, sneezing or nose irritation). One year after the law took effect, complaints of sensory symptoms among the sample of workers dropped by 57 percent. (Tobacco Control, 2005).