



WRA's stand on smoking bans

When it comes to regulation of smoking, the Wisconsin Restaurant Association's goal has always been to achieve a level playing field for everyone in the foodservice industry. Our mission is to protect the industry as a whole – including those who serve alcohol and those who don't.

The time has come for the Wisconsin Restaurant Association to support a statewide “workplace” smoking ban. WRA's board of directors has voted 36-1 to support such a ban, but it was not an easy decision to make. Here are some important factors that led to this decision:

- Ideally, businesses should be allowed to set their own policies, but the spread of local smoking bans has made it clear that those days are behind us.
- More and more WRA members are asking for a statewide smoking ban to level the playing field. Many say that they would like to ban smoking on their own, but they can't go it alone. They feel they would be able to keep most of their smoking customers if the government banned smoking, but not if they did it.
- There are already 30 local smoking bans in place in cities across Wisconsin, and many more are expected to pass in the next couple of years. Most of the local smoking bans give taverns a competitive advantage by exempting them.
- There are only two paths to a level playing field on smoking. One is no regulation at all, and the other is a complete ban. Anything in between unfairly creates winners and losers, with government regulations causing some businesses to thrive and others to perish.
- Twenty years ago, WRA worked with Senator Fred Risser to pass the Clean Indoor Air Act, which required non-smoking sections in all restaurants. It retained flexibility for restaurant operators to meet the demands of their customers for both smoking and non-smoking seating. It also bought our industry 20 years to prepare for the smoking ban that is to come.
- In 2005, WRA supported the Smoke Free Dining Act, which would have eliminated smoking in all dining rooms, but allowed smoking in bar areas only. This bill would have preempted local smoking ordinances and put restaurants and taverns statewide on a roughly level playing field. The bill failed to pass the state Senate and was opposed by Governor Jim Doyle.
- State preemption of local smoking bans is now a political impossibility. The only question now is: “Will a workplace smoking give taverns an advantage, or treat all establishments equally?”
- 26 states already ban smoking in restaurants, and 52% of Americans now live in cities or states that ban smoking in all restaurants.
- Of 42 directors on the WRA Board, 76% have alcohol licenses and 83% represent small independent businesses. They will be personally impacted by the smoking ban – just like you – but they determined this was the best course of action for the long-term good of our industry.
- WRA members in Madison and Appleton, the two cities with workplace bans in place already, are reporting increases in food sales and minimal losses in bar sales. Many believe they would not have lost any of their bar sales if smoking customers hadn't been able to drive out of the city to another establishment to smoke. Some actually reported gains in bar business after the ban. [See member testimonials on the reverse side of this sheet.]
- WRA remains staunchly opposed to local smoking bans, and will continue to fight in that arena.

WHAT DO WRA MEMBERS SAY ABOUT THE "WORKPLACE" SMOKING BAN?

"I agree with WRA's position on a smoke free workplace. I went smoke free in May of 2006. It was a great decision. Everyone likes it. The few smokers that I lost have all come back." *Cherry Perkins, Mr. Perkins Family Restaurant, Milwaukee*

"We decided to go completely non-smoking as of January 1, 2007 – even in our lounge where we frequently had smokers. I want you to know that we have not seen any decline in revenue. In fact, our numbers are up over the same period last year. The response from our guests has been overwhelmingly positive." *Joanne Palzkill, Draganetti's Ristorante, Altoona*

"I support this all the way. Let's take the lead on the smoking ban and do what's right for our industry." *Marc Bianchini, Osteria del Mondo, Milwaukee*

"My business picked up about ten percent immediately when I went non-smoking in 1988. I lost three regular customers, but they all came back within a year." *Glenn Fieber, Solly's Grill, Glendale*

"I fought the smoking ban in Appleton – tooth and nail. Now, I have to admit that my food business and my bar business both went up after the ban went into effect. I sure didn't expect that." *Mark Dougherty, Mark's Eastside, Appleton*

"From those of us who have been in the restaurant business all of our adult lives, we thank you wholeheartedly for your decision. It was as courageous as it was correct. In the face of overwhelming scientific evidence on second-hand smoke, it is time to provide our employees with the same healthy work environment enjoyed by workers in most other professions." *Bill Castagnozzi, Eagan's on Water, Milwaukee*

"I support WRA on the statewide smoking ban 100 percent, and I have already talked to my legislators about it." *Ron Boyer, The Village Green, Middleton*

"I congratulate WRA on their push for a statewide smoking ban. I was happy to read about it in the *WRA News*." *Jeff Wimmer, The Del-Bar, Wisconsin Dells*

"The current patchwork of local smoking bans creates confusion and unfair advantages for some. The only way to create a level playing field is to have a statewide ban that applies to all eating and drinking establishments." *Joan Cunningham, Schreiner's, Fond du Lac*

"Due to personal health, I made the decision to ban smoking in my establishment in 1995. I was worried it would affect my business adversely, but instead I saw an increase in business. In 32 years in this business, it was the best decision I have ever made." *Ada Lara Thimke, Lara's Tortilla Flats, Oshkosh*

"When Madison banned smoking in my bar in 2005, I was angry. My bar business went down because my smoking customers drove out to Westport. But, I've also seen an increase in dining customers and I believe my smoking customers will come back for my steaks when they can no longer smoke at other restaurants or bars." *John Kavanaugh, Kavanaugh's Esquire Club, Madison*