

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

REPORT ON THE "SMOKING SURVEY AMONG GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES" JUNE 1985

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Tobacco Programs
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BASIC ISSUE

The Director General of the World Health Organization has stated that:

"The control of cigarette smoking could do more to improve health and prolong life than any other single action in the field of preventive medicine."

BACKGROUND

The Department of Health's action plan on smoking and health in the Northwest Territories focuses on the development of strategies to address smoking issues for specific target populations.

The goals of a workplace smoking policy are:

1. To promote an increased awareness on the health hazards of sidestream smoke, smoking reduction solutions, and the smoking issue in general.
2. To involve all Government employees, union, management, smokers and non-smokers in a consultation and implementation process to formulate a smoking policy.
3. To reduce the conflict between smokers and non-smokers.
4. To provide support for smokers in their attempt to quit.
5. To reverse the negative effect of smoke on employee health, morale, and productivity.
6. To establish and maintain permanent positive changes in smoking attitudes and behaviour.
7. To create an environment that is supportive of non-smokers and considers the needs of smokers.
8. To establish non-smoking as a 'preferred' behavior among N.W.T. residents.
9. To protect workers, particularly those exposed to hazardous materials.
10. To protect non-smokers against the dangers and discomforts of passive smoke.

INTRODUCTION

Smoking in the workplace is becoming a matter of increasing concern. This is reflected by the continuing decline in the number of smokers and an increased awareness among non-smokers to the health hazards of being exposed to tobacco smoke. There is also increasing medical evidence to support that a danger to non-smokers exists from exposure to tobacco smoke. In order to satisfactorily resolve the problem of smoking in the workplace, the goodwill and co-operation of both smokers and non-smokers is required.

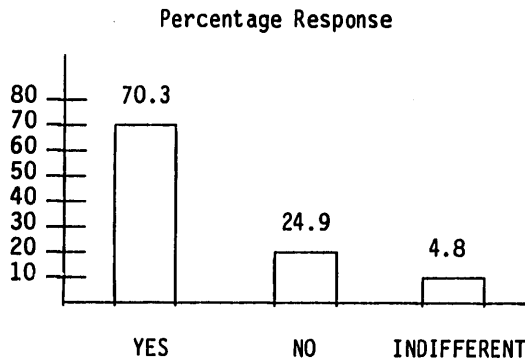
The Department of Health under its current mandate to assist smokers in quitting and protecting the health of non-smokers initiated a smoking survey in June 1985, among government employees.

The survey "Smoking in the Workplace" was designed to determine employee attitudes with regard to establishing a smoking policy within all government departments, and jurisdictions.

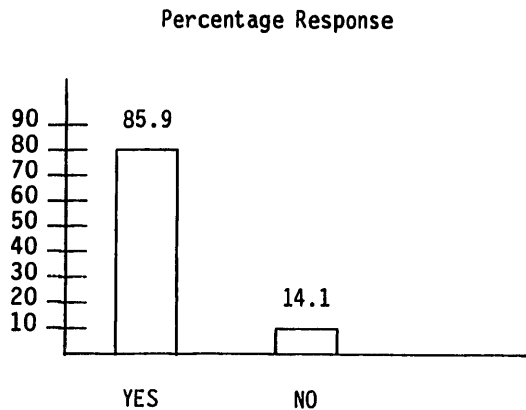
RESULTS

A total of 36.2% of government employees completed the smoking survey. Replies were received from all Regions in the N.W.T.

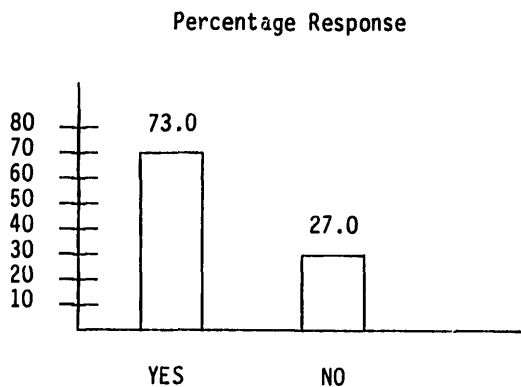
Question 1. Are you in favor of any government, departmental or legislative policy which restricts smoking in the workplace?



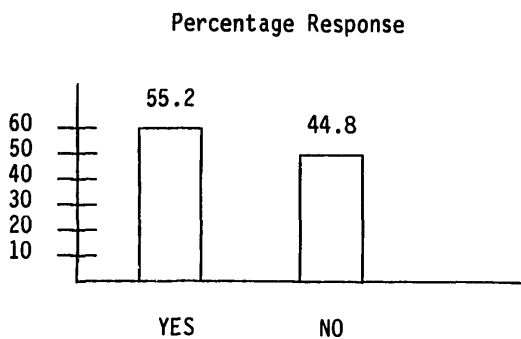
Question 2a. Should the policy restrict smoking during meetings held in boardrooms?



Question 2b. Should the policy restrict smoking during meetings held in private offices?

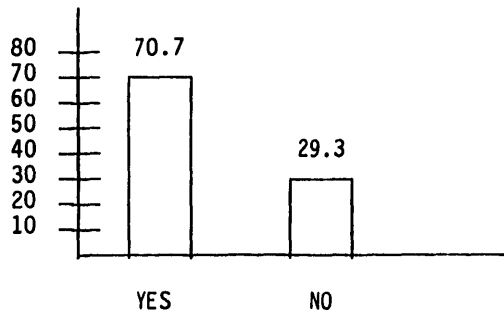


Question 2c. Should the policy restrict smoking during working hours to coffee breaks only?



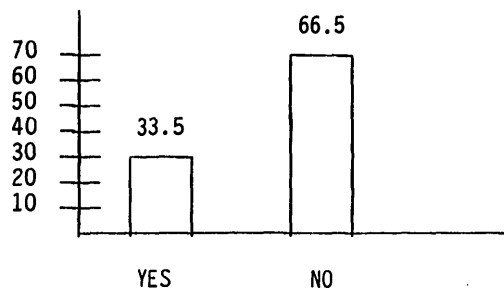
Question 2d. Should the policy restrict smoking during working hours to a designated smoking area within each department?

Percentage Response



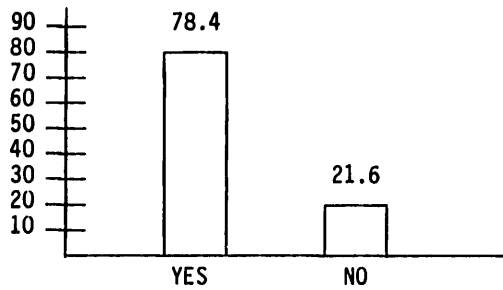
Question 2e. Should the policy have a complete restriction on smoking during working hours?

Percentage Response



Question 3. Are you in favour of legislation or bylaws governing non-smoking areas in public places? (Banks, grocery stores, arenas, etc.)

Percentage Response



GOVERNMENT CHARTERED AIRCRAFT

Respondents felt there was a need for smoking restrictions on small government chartered aircraft as indicated by the following comment:

"Please consider smoking restrictions on charter flights. There's nothing worse than being trapped on a small plane with a bunch of smokers for 3 or 4 hours! At the office, a non-smoker can always take a fresh air break periodically, but not when you are sailing along at 10,000 feet!"

Another respondent said,

"restrict smoke while flying on small aircraft which has limited ventilation ie. Charters-Cessna/85, Islanders, etc."

PUBLIC PLACES

Both smokers and non-smokers felt there was a need to address this concern, as government offices were also considered public places. A significant number of respondents also were concerned about the lack of non-smoking areas in the private sector.

One Commented:

"Smoking should be prohibited by employees who are in public view, and dealing with the public."

others commented:

"It is frustrating to be in a public place and to be surrounded by smoke, especially when small children are present... I do not feel that smoking in grocery stores, especially around meat and produce should be allowed...I would like to see more stringent laws governing non-smoking areas in restaurants, fast food places, clothing stores and schools where teachers should be role models." , and,

"I believe that the consequences of not legislating smoking in public places are too severe to justify continuation of the present situation (former smoker)."

GENERAL COMMENTS

The general reaction from those opposed to a policy on smoking in the workplace centered around the "Rights Issue". Such comments as,

"Everyone is talking about the Rights of the non-smokers. What ever happened to the rights of the people who smoke?"

"Smoking should be left up to each individual person whether she or he determine their own habits. One should never condone other behaviors, should it be smoking or drinking."

Other areas of concern in response to government intervention on a smoking policy consisted of comments such as:

"Senior and mid-level government bureaucrats should not attempt to influence politicians into legislating individual life styles. Will the Department of Health be in our bedrooms next?" .

Another remarked,

"I do not feel it is a matter for politicians to waste my tax money on. Besides it's a personal choice."

and,

"I am a non-smoker not withstanding that the ills of second hand smoke, the greater evil, is more law and government intervention in our lives."

Both smokers and non-smokers overwhelmingly felt there was a need for a designated well-ventilated smoking area where the smoke would not be re-circulated back into the system.

It should be noted that a significant number of respondents not in favor of a policy, supported the question of legislation governing non-smoking areas in public places, and partial restrictions on smoking in the workplace.

On the complete restriction question, a large number of smokers and non-smokers did not favor a complete ban during working hours by a 2 to 1 margin.

Summary

The number of respondents to the smoking questionnaire and their comments clearly reflect a wide spread concern in this area. This concern almost without exception results in strong support of a policy on smoking in the workplace.

The question frequently asked throughout the questionnaires was "How soon can we have this policy implemented? "In view of this sense of urgency which a significant number of respondents feel, the results of this survey, and scientific evidence, clearly indicate the need for a clean indoor air policy.

Concerns were also expressed from smokers and non-smokers on the immediate requirement for adequate ventilation in government buildings especially in remote communities, throughout the N.W.T., as summarized by one respondent,

"Office buildings should be sufficiently ventilated to clear away smoke, if not, the problem is greater than smoking."

Finally, the objective of meaningfully involving as many people as possible in the development and implementation of a policy will result in trust and co-operation by management, unions, smokers and non-smokers.

The general trend of the survey indicated that both smokers and non-smokers favored some form of restrictions on smoking in the workplace.

The results of the survey will be presented to the Government of the Northwest Territories for subsequent action.