



ANCHOR

ACCELERATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS

SPREADING THE WORD: BUILDING AWARENESS AND INCREASING ACCESS TO SMOKE-FREE WORKPLACES



Smoke-free environments have a reach far beyond tobacco users. They also protect nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke, which increases the risk of developing heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, respiratory illnesses and other potentially deadly health problems. Workplace policies that prohibit indoor smoking are an effective way to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke. In the absence of a statewide non-smoking policy, cities throughout Texas have worked locally to create smoke-free environments. Houston, the state's most populous city, enacted a comprehensive smoke-free ordinance in 2006; the neighboring communities of Conroe and Missouri City, however, failed to follow suit. Efforts now are underway in those Houston suburbs to motivate the public and partners about the devastating impact of secondhand smoke and the importance of creating smoke-free environments.

The Challenge

Exposure to secondhand smoke causes serious diseases among both smokers and non-smokers. Secondhand smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals, hundreds of which are toxic. Policies that prohibit workplace smoking reduce exposure to secondhand smoke, thereby reducing health risks.



“Ongoing exposure to secondhand smoke is dangerous and can lead to death. Policies that increase access to smoke-free workplaces are one way to combat this serious health threat.”

- Sheryl Gottshall, Circle of Red Volunteer and Survivor

The Solution

American Heart Association staff are engaging citizens and key partners in a smoke-free air campaign that includes the residents of Montgomery and Fort Bend counties, where Conroe and Missouri City are located. An education alert was distributed via email to American Heart Association volunteers in the two target areas. The alert included an online petition where advocates could sign up to show their support. Houston-area allies also had the opportunity to attend a local meeting where they learned about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke and the benefits of having smoke-free workplace policies in place. Those facts and details were also posted to the local American Heart Association Facebook page. During American Heart Month in February, efforts were undertaken to engage American Heart Association volunteers, the public and key partners to promote the adoption of smoke-free environments. Efforts included incorporating key messages into events such as National Go Red Day and Heart Balls.

Sustaining Efforts

Implementation of smoke-free policies is the most effective way to reduce secondhand smoke exposure among the public. Increased access to smoke-free environments will greatly benefit the health of Conroe and Missouri City residents. To achieve that goal, the American Heart Association will continue to educate residents about the dangers of secondhand smoke and the benefits of smoke-free communities. Staff have identified opportunities to engage the public through social media to deliver key messages and involve new and past partners to garner support for this effort. Partners have rallied with the American Heart Association to disseminate educational materials, engage the business community, and partner with major smoke-free supporters including the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, American Cancer Society and the Montgomery County Hospital District.



Policy, System and Environmental Change

Increased attention on the issue will improve continued efforts to engage citizens around the fight to limit exposure to secondhand smoke and encourage them to demand the right for everyone to breathe clean air.

Results

American Heart Association staff members were invited to present their efforts at the January 2016 Montgomery County Heart Board as a result of a previous presentation to county volunteers the previous September. Staff were also invited in January to Conroe's City Council meeting, where the Mayor proclaimed February 5, 2016, as "National Go Red Day" for the City of Conroe. A local "Go Red for Women" volunteer accepted the proclamation, noting that the community could greatly improve its heart health with smoke-free air. Finally, networking efforts have resulted in building a community coalition with a mission of protecting the health of the 137,580 residents of Conroe and Missouri City.

Get Involved

In the coming months, the American Heart Association will continue to increase and heighten its efforts on this important issue by educating the public, recruiting key volunteers and community partners, and building community support. Show your support for American Heart Association efforts and for creating smoke-free communities by signing an [online pledge](#) to help educate the public about the devastating effects of tobacco and secondhand smoke.