

## VOLUNTARY RESTAURANT PROGRAM

Currently twenty-six states and the District of Columbia have laws which restrict smoking in restaurants. The majority of these laws affect restaurants with seating capacities ranging from 25-75. More than 400 localities restrict smoking in restaurants. In 1990 the San Luis Obispo, CA city council passed a law banning cigarette smoking in enclosed public buildings, including restaurants. Patrons are now forced to the sidewalk between *Diagonal* to smoke.

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- Emphasize that legislators are less likely to introduce bills if restaurants have voluntary policies.

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Because of increasing public smoking legislation requiring restaurants to provide nonsmoking sections, The Tobacco Institute has expanded its accommodation program to focus on restaurants. The challenge is to persuade legislators that restaurateurs are capable of addressing the wants and needs of their patrons without mandatory restrictions.

Public Affairs and the State Activities Division will work together in identifying local/state restaurant associations who would be interested in adopting a voluntary restaurant program.

The objective of the voluntary restaurant program is to encourage restaurant owners to voluntarily provide smoking and nonsmoking sections in their establishments. A voluntary policy discourages the perceived need for state and local legislation requiring mandatory nonsmoking sections.

One of our primary goals is to persuade restaurateurs that it's in their best interest to voluntarily provide designated smoking and nonsmoking areas in an effort to meet the preferences of all their patrons.

Following is the development plan:

**Regional Field Staff.** State Activities field staff will take the lead in making initial contact with local/state restaurant associations. Through normal lobbying efforts, field staff is generally connected with the hospitality industry. Therefore, an outreach won't be perceived as unusual.

- Persuade restaurateurs that a voluntary policy allows them to address the preferences of all patrons.
- Emphasize that legislators are less likely to introduce bills if restaurants have voluntary policies.

**Joint Meeting.** Field staff, public affairs staff and restaurant association representative will meet to outline the specific guidelines. These guidelines will include some or all of the following examples.

- The program is strictly voluntary. The restaurant association is the sponsor of any and all materials to be developed.
- Restaurants are encouraged to set aside smoking and nonsmoking areas sufficient to meet customer demand. Keeping in mind that demand may often vary by time of day or day of week. Nevertheless customers will appreciate being offered the choice of smoking or nonsmoking.
- Designated smoking and nonsmoking sections should be clearly indicated for customer convenience. For example, small unobtrusive table tent cards or wall signs.
- Select areas that can expand and contract depending on customer demand. Provide good ventilation. If possible, smoking areas should be located adjacent to exhaust vents. This is yet another example that the restaurateur is concerned with the wants and needs of all patrons.
- Separation can be subtly accomplished with natural barriers such as plants or booths. If there is sufficient demand and several rooms are available, the restaurateur may wish to designate smoking and nonsmoking rooms.
- Both areas should include preferred seating.
- Customers should be asked if they have a preference when reservations are made and prior to seating.
- Involve the staff -- they are in constant contact with customers. This will minimize possible conflict, such as smokers inadvertently smoking in nonsmoking sections.
- The restaurant association will provide necessary signage to participating association members and non-members.
- Restaurateurs should evaluate the effectiveness of the program on an ongoing basis.

**Production.** Public affairs will draft text. Each brochure will reflect the persona of the restaurant association.

- Public affairs will work with the production department to develop appropriate materials.
- The final product will be shipped and distributed by the restaurant association.

Each participating restaurant should promote the availability of choice seating -- smoking or nonsmoking. This can be accomplished in small but effective ways such as asking customers their preference when taking reservations and/or before seating and listing available options at the bottom of the menu.

By providing customers with a choice of smoking or nonsmoking sections, restaurateurs are demonstrating that they care about the people they serve as individuals who have different preferences and expectations. The voluntary policy will also guarantee the restaurateur the necessary flexibility.

A voluntary program sends a message to local/state government that restaurants are responsibly addressing the issue of smoking. The program, by definition, is self-policing. Therefore, local/state government will not be required to devote money or manpower to enforcement.