

Examination of the Effects on Bars and Restaurants if La Crosse County was Smoke Free

Introduction

The County of La Crosse in the State of Wisconsin has a bitter war brewing. The controversy is regarding a possible smoking ban in La Crosse County. On October 17, 2008, the County Board decided to postpone a vote on this issue, stating that the board will wait until the state government decides how to handle a smoking ban. Jerry Sebranek, La Crosse County Supervisor, said "It (the smoking ban) was too vague and didn't cover everyone" (La Crosse Puts...).

Most bar and restaurant owners in La Crosse County believe that a smoking ban in public places will put them at a distinct disadvantage economically. The owners feel many of their smoking customers will drive across the county line to an establishment that does not have a smoking ban. However, people who support the ban believe that individuals should have the right to enter and patronize an establishment without the risk of second hand smoke.

This report will show both sides of the issue on smoking bans and the economic effects they may have on business owners and the citizens that live in the community.

Methods

The data collected for this report was obtained by surveying a cross section of 110 people in La Crosse County. The survey consisted of four questions for smokers and four questions for non-smokers.

The questions were designed to determine what lengths that people would be willing to go to patronize an establishment based upon whether or not smoking was allowed in that place. Additionally, questions were designed to see if individuals would consider their personal smoking habits when seeking employment.

The surveys were handed out subjectively at Western Technical College cafeteria, a woman's recreational basketball league, and the Valley View Mall in La Crosse. The surveys were then tabulated by adding all the answers for each question and examining the results.

Much of the background research was done using the internet. A search was done, primarily for information about communities in Wisconsin and across the nation that have a smoking ban in place, to find out the economic impact on bars and restaurants. We also found articles that outlined many other aspects of the ban on smoking, including some of the health, behavioral, and economic implications.

Results

Below are the questions on the survey as well as the results of the survey questions. Of the 110 people surveyed, 32 identified as smokers, and 78 as non-smokers.

If you Smoke

- 1) Do you specifically seek out bars and restaurants that allow smoking? Yes 25.0% No 75.0%

- 2) If La Crosse went smoke free, would you drive outside of La Crosse County to a bar or restaurant specifically because they allow smoking? Yes 25.0% No 75.0%

- 3) If your favorite bar or restaurant went smoke free, how often would you patronize that bar or restaurant?

 More 3.1% Same 56.3% Less 40.6%

- 4) Would you seek employment at a business that is smoke free?

 Yes 68.7% No 31.3%

If you are a Non-smoker

- 1) Do you specifically seek out bars or restaurants that are smoke free? Yes 42.3% No 57.7%

- 2) Would you drive outside of La Crosse County to a bar or restaurant specifically because it has a smoke free environment?
 Yes 32.1% No 67.9%

- 3) If your favorite restaurant went smoke free, how often would you patronize that bar or restaurant?

 More 51.3% Same 43.6% Less 5.1%

- 4) Would you seek employment at a business that allows smoking?

 Yes 39.7% No 60.3%

Discussion

ABC News reported on November 8, 2005, that smoking bans in airplanes, offices, and restaurants have not only reduced the public's exposure to dangerous second-hand smoke, but reduced smoking overall. It is theorized that these smoking bans increase the stigma and hassle of smoking. Work place bans seem to be especially helpful, seeing an up to a 30% drop in cigarette consumption when the workplace is smoke free. In New York City, the number of adult smokers fell by 500,000 in four years due, in part, to of the smoking bans in bars and restaurants (Stark).

The Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine state that children who live in communities with smoking bans that are strictly enforced are 40% less likely to become regular smokers. The Boston University School of Public Health has said that smoking bans send a message that smoking is socially unacceptable (Siegal).

The *La Crosse Tribune* published an article in December of 2007 stating the smoking ban is about “public health – not freedom.” Wisconsin is largely surrounded by non-smoking states. Minnesota went smoke free in October, 2007, and Illinois began a smoking ban January 1, 2008. In New York City, where they have been smoke-free since 2003, the goal is to protect the employees and patrons from second-hand smoke. It has been noted that in New York City, three years after the smoking ban was put in place, there was an 8% decline in heart attacks, which represents \$56 million in long-term health-care savings. Similar statistics have been found around the country in areas that have public smoking bans. In Pueblo, Colorado, the heart attack rate has dropped by 27%. In Helena, Montana, heart attacks have dropped 40% (Anti- Smoking...). It is believed that these dramatic reductions in heart attacks are due, at least partially, to a diminished exposure to cigarette smoke. These statistics have shown that the cost of health care to both smokers and non-smokers can be greatly decreased with reductions in the number of cigarettes smoked and the amount of second-hand smoke to which individuals are exposed.

The other side of this issue is the anticipated drop in sales for owners of the bars and restaurants that are forced to have a smoking ban. In January of 2003, the Dallas, Texas, City Council passed a smoking ban in all public places. One year later, the Dallas Restaurant Association hired two professors of applied economics to study the economic effects the smoking ban had on the restaurants. The study found that there was an \$11.8 million decline in alcohol sales, and at least 4 restaurant closings were blamed on the ban (Clower and Weinstein). A similar study was done by the Ridgewood Economic Associates in New York City. It found that nearly 2000 jobs were lost as a result of the ban. Additionally, \$28.5 million in wages and salaries and \$37 million in gross state product were lost due to the ban (Ridgewood). Closer to home, it has been reported that 12 bars and restaurants have closed since the smoking ban was put into place in Madison, Wisconsin. In Appleton, Wisconsin, which has been smoke-free since April of 2005, it is estimated that 8 bars and restaurants have closed due, in part, to the smoking ban.

Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle also proposes a statewide ban on smoking, in public places. However, this smoking ban would not apply to Indian Casinos, as they are on reservation land and are recognized as Sovereign Nations by the Federal Government, which do not have to abide by federal or state laws. This is a very big issue with bar and restaurant owners near casinos, as they feel that there is an unfair advantage for the casinos that are allowed to have smokers in their establishments (Market, Not...).

Our research did not examine many of the social and health costs of a smoking ban. We did look at a small sample of local people to determine some of the behavioral impacts that a smoking ban could have on local businesses. Our results demonstrate that 37.3% of smokers and non-smokers combined seek out bars or restaurants specifically because of the smoking environment, while 62.7% of smokers and non-smokers combined do not seek out bars and restaurants because of the smoking environment. It should also be noted that 51.3% of non-smokers said they would patronize an establishment more often if the establishment went smoke free, while 40.6% surveyed smokers said they would visit a bar or restaurant less often if it was smoke free.

Conclusion

As evidenced in this paper, a smoking ban in La Crosse County would likely have social, economic, and health implications. Despite these concerns, this survey has shown that 75.0% of smokers say they do not specifically seek out establishments that allow smoking, and 57.7% of the non-smokers said they do not seek out restaurants that are smoke-free, suggesting that the implications of such a ban in this area may not adversely affect area businesses as much as many fear. There are other health and economic implications beyond the scope of our survey which have been examined in other communities. From the information extracted, it seems that the best answer relies on a compromise between what is best for business and what is best for the community at large. Since the livelihood of bar and restaurant owners depends on patrons supporting their businesses, it seems clear that a state wide smoking ban in public places would provide the fairest and best solution. This would put all businesses on a level playing field, while protecting the citizens of Wisconsin from the harmful effects of tobacco smoke.

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