

Assessing Elected Officials' Positions on Clean Indoor Air Ordinances:

Conversations for policy advocacy and evaluation

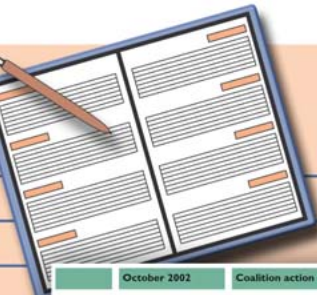
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Date	Interviewee	Respondent	Your opinion regarding BHS	Voters' opinions re BHS	Government role	Altma
10/23/2002	Sheldon Frank	Al Bitner	Secondhand smoke isn't much of a problem. People do what they want. If they don't like the smoke, they can leave.	Sure, smoke bothers people. But they can choose to go somewhere else.	It's not an appropriate role for government.	Ordinance restricts people's freedom.
10/25/2002	Penny Thompson	Jeff Ward	I think secondhand smoke is a big problem in our city, especially for children.	Secondhand smoke is a huge problem in our community. I'm a retired nurse and have seen the devastation smoking causes in people's lives.	I don't really know how people in my district feel about this issue. I would imagine that there is strong sentiment to regulate public spaces where families congregate.	I'd be willing to consider an ordinance, but I know I would have a lot from the restaurant owners. I'm just not convinced it wouldn't hurt their business.
10/25/2002	Penny Thompson	Beverly De	I haven't really thought about secondhand smoke much, although I heard about what they did in Hawaii, and that sort of scares me.	Secondhand smoke really bothers my family, but it doesn't bother me too much.	This is a classic opportunity for government to act in the public interest.	Smoking is a public health hazard.
10/27/2002	Jeremy Fox	Cal Pitter				Smoking is a public health hazard.



	October 2002	Coalition action	December 2003
Jeff Ward Alderman District 6	"I'd be willing to consider an ordinance, but I know I would hear a lot from the restaurant owners. I'm just not convinced it wouldn't hurt their business."	Met with Ward on three occasions to present evidence from other communities about economic impact.	"There is no evidence from any other communities with restaurant smoking bans that this ordinance will negatively affect business. In fact, 73% of adults in our county would prefer to eat in non-smoking restaurants."
Karl Herrmann Mayor	"Sure, secondhand smoke is a public health hazard. But so is anthrax, and that's what's on the radar screen right now."	Met with Herrmann twice. Organized letter-writing campaign in February, just after Herrmann's granddaughter was born.	"I have heard from many of my constituents – nearly 400 concerned citizens have written asking me to support this ordinance secondhand smoke is a real issue. I and our child's grandchild
Janice Dougherty Alderman District 4	"I really haven't thought much about regulating secondhand smoke. No one in my district has ever brought it up as a high priority."	Organized visit to Dougherty's office with the local ALA asthma support group and their parents. Flew once with her and once with sympathetic staffer who lost mother to smoking-related illness.	"Ten this address a ward visit January 7 about how feel what around to smokers. I have a ch need the a smoker."
Al Flannigan Alderman District 3	"People should be able to do what they want, when they want. This is no role for government."	Sent constituents – to Flannigan's office each month for ten months.	"I've vote for this ordinance just to get those damned public health zealous out of my hair. They are at me constantly, and they reassure me that IUCross and Ashland

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Do your local elected officials support smoke-free ordinances?

Conversations for policy advocacy and evaluation

Assessing the local “political climate” is a key step in a campaign to pass a local ordinance to restrict smoking in public places and worksites. This booklet provides guidance about how to assess the positions of local elected officials regarding their support of smoke-free ordinances.

Interviews with local elected officials do not have to be formal surveys or structured interviews. They can – and arguably should – be conversations. Think about them as exercises to inform how to proceed with the campaign and as opportunities to evaluate progress over time.

Think of the way newspaper reporters collect information. They initiate conversations, build trust, ask questions (often in a causal way) and write down every detail of what was said. They note to themselves potential leads, and good reporters investigate those leads. Do the same when assessing the political climate in your community.



These conversations can take place in formal or informal settings. Schedule a meeting with the elected official at his or her office. Bring a constituent from the elected official’s district. The constituent’s views are paramount to the elected official, particularly when the constituent can make a convincing argu-

ment. Brief the constituent prior to the meeting so that your message is clear.

You can also talk with elected officials in informal settings—during a sporting event, over lunch at a Rotary Club meeting, in a car on the way to a community event, or at a program organized by youth. Questions posed anonymously during candidate forums have also been used to better understand the positions of candidates before they are elected.

The box to the right is a “crib sheet” of the elements that conversations with elected officials should contain. Page 6 contains more detailed questions, adapted from the American Cancer Society’s Community Assessment Guide to Determine a Community’s Readiness for a Smoke-Free Policy Campaign. Use copies of that page to systematically document what the elected official said.

Interviews with local elected officials do not have to be formal surveys or structured interviews. They can – and arguably should – be conversations. Use the information to improve the approach and to track and report progress.

Key elements of the conversation with an elected official

- The elected official's opinion:**
Do you (the elected official) think secondhand smoke is a problem?
- Voters' opinions:**
Do you think the community thinks secondhand smoke a problem?
- Government role:**
What is the role of government?
- Alternatives to ordinance:**
If no government role, what is a better approach?
- Perception of public support:**
Is there public support for an ordinance?
- Other policy makers:**
Will other opinion leaders support this ordinance?
- Community education:**
What information does the community need?

Engage active coalition members to conduct these interviews. “Assign” a team of coalition members to “have a few conversations with local elected officials.” Hold a small (one-hour) training about how and when to gather the information and record the details of conversations. Local policy makers who already support the ordinance effort can help strategize about how and when to

hold these conversations. That local official can even help by having some of the conversations him or herself!

If repeated and documented over time, these interviews will help the coalition report progress in influencing attitudes and opinions of local policy makers. Did the opinions of elected officials change primarily because of the coalition’s efforts?

During the conversations, it’s important that the elected official does not seem threatened. Avoid taking an “advocacy” role when collecting this information. Instead, try

envisioning yourself as a newspaper reporter with the goal of collecting the information to write a relatively unbiased report of what you heard. This will help reduce the bias that will inevitably enter into the conversations when the elected official finds out who you are or why you are asking the questions.

Tracking and analyzing data

To track the information, maintain a database or spreadsheet of quotes recorded by the interviewers. The Excel spreadsheet below illustrates one way to keep track of the information. A simple handwritten table will also help.

As the database grows, begin to assess where each elected official falls on the continuum of support

(e.g., strongly opposed, opposed, ambivalent, supportive, strongly supportive) and where each could use information about voter preferences or evidence about the probable economic impact (or lack of impact!) of an ordinance on restaurant revenues.

Tracking the information over time will document whether change in attitudes has occurred. Create a simple table of quotes to help illustrate this change. In the example above, Jeff Ward indicates that he is willing to consider an ordinance, but he would like to know the evidence about economic impact. This is a good opportunity for the coalition to visit him with the wealth of evidence showing no negative economic impact of the ordinance (see www.tobwis.org and www.no-smoke.org for sources of evidence). The following table uses Jeff’s own words to illustrate his level of support before and after coalition action.

Interviews with public officials, Williams County						
Date	Interviewer	Respondent	Your opinion regarding SHS	Voters' opinions re SHS	Government role	Alternative
10/23/2002	Sheldon Frank	Al Bittner	Secondhand smoke isn't much of a problem. People do what they want. If they don't like the smoke, they can leave.	Sure, smoke bothers people. But they can choose to go somewhere else.	It's not an appropriate role for government.	Alternative ventilation for restaurants, people smoking for themselves
10/25/2002	Penny Thompson	Jeff Ward	I think secondhand smoke is a big problem in our city, especially for children.	I don't really know how people in my district feel about this issue. I would imagine that there is strong sentiment to regulate public spaces where families congregate.	I'd be willing to consider an ordinance, but I know I would hear a lot from the restaurant owners. I'm just not convinced it wouldn't hurt their business.	
10/25/2002	Penny Thompson	Beverly Dale	Secondhand smoke is a huge problem in our community. I'm a retired nurse and have seen the devastation smoking creates in people's lives.	I think people hate secondhand smoke.	This is a classic opportunity for government to act in the public interest.	
10/27/2002	Jeremy Fox	Cal Potter	I haven't really thought about secondhand smoke much, although I heard about what they did in Neenah, and that sort of scares me.	Secondhand smoke really bothers my family, but it doesn't bother me too much.	I think there are other priorities that we should tackle at the municipal level.	Smokers learn how to smoke more responsibly

Stated opinions of local elected officials regarding support for restaurant smoking ordinance, 2002-2003

	October 2002	Coalition action	December 2003
Jeff Ward Alderman District 6	"I'd be willing to consider an ordinance, but I know I would hear a lot from the restaurant owners. I'm just not convinced it wouldn't hurt their business."	Met with Ward on three occasions to present evidence from other communities about economic impact.	"There is no evidence from any other communities with restaurant smoking bans that this ordinance will negatively affect business. In fact, 75% of adults in our county would prefer to eat in non-smoking restaurants."
Karl Hermann Mayor	"Sure, secondhand smoke is a public health hazard. But so is anthrax, and that's what's on the radar screen right now."	Met with Hermann twice. Organized letter-writing campaign in February, just after Hermann's granddaughter was born.	"I have heard from many of my constituents – nearly 400 concerned citizens have written asking me to support this ordinance – that secondhand smoke is a real issue that we need to address. Let's do it for our children and grandchildren."
Janice Dougherty Alderwoman District 4	"I really haven't thought much about regulating secondhand smoke. No one in my district has ever brought it up as a high priority."	Organized visit to Dougherty's office with the local ALA asthma support group and their parents. Met once with her and once with sympathetic staffer who lost mother to smoking-related illness.	"Ten children with asthma who live in my ward visited me last January. They told me about how their lungs feel when they have to be around someone who smokes. The kids don't have a choice. I think we need the lasting impact of a smoke-free ordinance."
Al Flannigan Alderman District 3	"People should be able to do what they want, when they want. This is no role for government."	Sent constituents – asthmatics, former smokers, families with children – to Flannigan's office each month for ten months.	"I'll vote for this ordinance just to get those damned public health zealots out of my hair. They are at me constantly, and they reassure me that LaCrosse and Ashland restaurants haven't had any fallout in their incomes because of the law."

Name of elected official: _____

Date: _____ Context: _____

1. **How serious a problem do you think secondhand smoke is in our community?**
2. **How do you think the community feels about being exposed to secondhand smoke in public places?**
3. **Do you think it's appropriate for government to play a role by enacting ordinances to protect people from exposure to secondhand smoke?**

If not, what in your opinion is a better solution?

Do they say any of these?

- *Technical solutions – separate smoking sections, proper ventilation*
- *"Market forces" – the public will "vote with their feet" by choosing where they would like to go*
- *Educate business owners about risks of employee exposure to secondhand smoke and benefits of smoke-free policy*
- *Educate the community*
- *Educate smokers about how to consider others when they smoke*
- *Not sure – just that it's a question of economic impact on businesses*

4. **Do you think there is community support for action to reduce secondhand smoke in public places? What about workplaces?**
5. **Do you think other community leaders and policy makers support action to reduce secondhand smoke in public places? What about workplaces?**
6. **Do you think there would be opposition to action to reduce secondhand smoke in public places?**
 - 6a. **If so, do you think the tobacco industry would be involved locally in this opposition?**
7. **What types of information do you think the community needs regarding secondhand smoke?**
8. **How should this information be delivered?**



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www.uwex.edu/ces/tobaccoeval

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