

# NEW YORK STATE COLLEGES EXPEL TOBACCO





## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Smoke-free (SF) or tobacco-free (TF) campus policies are a growing trend across the country. Almost 600 colleges have implemented a SF/TF campus policy in the U.S. Public and private institutions of higher education are recognizing the important health and economic benefits of having a SF/TF campus policy. Secondhand tobacco smoke is classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a Class A carcinogen, the same as asbestos, and there is no safe level of exposure. Recent evidence suggests that even short term exposure to secondhand smoke outside puts those with cardiac and pulmonary disease at risk. In addition to reducing exposure to secondhand smoke, SF/TF campus policies help to reduce initiation of tobacco use among young people and assist youth and adults trying to quit smoking. College age youth in New York have a smoking prevalence rate (23.1%) that is 83% higher than high school students 12.6%) suggesting that a large number of youth are beginning to smoke in college.

Unfortunately, the NYS Tobacco Control Program's Colleges for Change Program, which was charged with addressing the smoking problem at colleges, was eliminated this past year because of budget cuts. Meanwhile, the state takes in more than \$1.5 billion each year from tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes but is spending only 4 cents on the dollar to help people quit, reduce secondhand smoke exposure, and assisting institutions like colleges to become tobacco free.

#### Methods

The American Cancer Society gathered data for *Tobacco-Free U* over the course of one year from 98 percent of college campuses across New York State (192 out of 194 colleges).

## **Findings**

- 17 percent have implemented a tobacco-free or smoke-free campus policy.
- 23 percent are in the process of adopting/implementing a tobacco-free or smoke-free policy in the near future.
- Overall, 40 percent of college campuses either have implemented or are in the process of implementing a SF/TF policy.
- There was a sixteen-fold increase in the number of NYS colleges that have adopted SF/TF policies since the mid 2000s.

## Recommendations

- All NYS colleges should adopt a Tobacco Free Campus policy to protect the entire campus community. Colleges should not be supporting the initiation of a lifelong addiction to tobacco as a result of weak policies that put young and vulnerable people at risk
- NYS should better support SF/TF campus policies by increasing funding to the NYS Tobacco Control Program incrementally to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommended level of \$254 Million per year.
- New York should follow the lead of two other states by requiring that all private and public colleges have in place and enforce a tobacco-free campus policy.

## **BACKGROUND**

College campuses are an important target of the tobacco industry due to the number of young adults they can reach with their products. Each year cigarette manufacturers need to addict more than 400,000 new users in the U.S. to replace those who have died from the long term use of tobacco.<sup>6</sup>

The tobacco industry attempts to take advantage of college age youth, understanding that this period is when many long-term lifestyle choices are made and solidified. This period has been labeled as a dynamic time in the lives of college students. <sup>1</sup> Use of tobacco for the first time and use of tobacco regularly has been seen to increase while in college from freshman to senior year. <sup>2</sup> Not only does this put the 18-24 age group at a higher risk for initiating or strengthening an addiction to tobacco but it simultaneously endangers non-smokers on campus.

Tobacco-free campuses are a growing trend for private and state run colleges across the country. Five-hundred and eighty-six colleges are 100% smoke-free with no exceptions as of October 2011.<sup>3</sup> This TF campus trend in the U.S. is correlated with the increase in states that have enacted strong clean indoor air legislation and recent scientific studies detailing the harmful effects of even shortterm exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke.<sup>4</sup> Secondhand tobacco smoke is classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a Class A carcinogen, the same as asbestos, and there is no safe level of exposure. Recent evidence suggests that even short term exposure to secondhand smoke outside puts those with cardiac and pulmonary disease at risk. In addition to reducing exposure to secondhand smoke, SF/TF campus policies help to reduce initiation of tobacco use among young people and assist youth and adults trying to quit smoking.<sup>4</sup> The adoption of tobacco-free college campus policies may also be facilitated by the increased focus of large employers on employee wellness to reduce spiraling healthcare costs. Studies indicate that businesses experience higher healthcare costs and lower rates of productivity as a result of tobacco using employees.<sup>5</sup> A tobaccofree policy on college campuses may lead to a reduction in upper respiratory infections and other tobacco-related illnesses among students, lower rates of smoking among employees and students, higher class attendance, lower maintenance and cleaning costs, lower risk of fires, a more attractive campus, and reduced insurance rates.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past decade, there have been various grassroots efforts in New York State to enhance tobacco related policies in the college setting. In 2001, the American Cancer Society (ACS) initiated a two year project called the NYS College Alliance Against Tobacco which began working with many campuses across the state to change tobacco related policies. At that time the major focus was to make dormitories smoke-free. Later that year ACS conducted a survey of all colleges in NYS regarding their smoking policies. The survey suggested that no colleges had a SF/TF campus policy in place. By 2006, there were only two colleges in central New York with a smoke-free property policy: one a small private school and the other a state medical school and hospital. A state law was enacted in 2008 that mandated that all dormitories at public and private colleges be completely smoke-free. In 2009, the NYS Tobacco Control Program began funding an initiative called Colleges for Change (C4C). Seven contractors were funded to work with college students to promote tobacco-free norms and policies. ACS and C4C created the NYS Colleges Tobacco-free Initiative in 2010 to work with partners across the state to encourage and help support tobacco-free campus policies. Unfortunately the C4C program was terminated in 2011 due to state budget cuts.

In New York State, rates of smoking in the 18-24 age group is 83% higher (23.1%) compared to high school youth (12.6%)<sup>9</sup> suggesting that more young people are starting to smoke while in college. A tobacco-free policy ensures that campuses are not unintentionally supporting the initiation of lifelong tobacco addiction among students as a result of weak smoking policies. Studies have found tobacco-free policies to be an effective way to reduce tobacco use among college students.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this research was to determine to what extent have colleges in New York State adopted smoke-free or tobacco-free campus policies.

## **METHODS**

The American Cancer Society developed a survey instrument to gather information on current college campuses tobacco policies in New York State. The survey took place between July 2010 and July 2011. The second and third round of data collection focused on follow-up of previous answers to delineate progress toward the establishment of a tobacco-free policy and to validate previous findings.

The survey tool inquired about each college campus policy related to tobacco. Questions included (1) current policy regarding tobacco use on campus, (2) the policy on the use of tobacco products in any college owned multi-unit housing, (3) the process and participation in changing current tobacco policy, (4) and tobacco sales and whether tobacco industry sponsorship of events is allowed. This report focuses on SF/TF policies. A college was deemed "smoke-free" if smoking was not allowed anywhere on property owned or leased by the college. If there were no areas on campus or occupied by the college where smoking any tobacco products or using smokeless tobacco products were allowed, the school was considered "tobacco-free".

The American Cancer Society contacted colleges from two groups: (1) sixty State University of New York (SUNY) colleges and (2) one hundred and eleven private colleges. Colleges of the City of New York (CUNY) were to be contacted in a subsequent survey wave when resources became available. However, during the study period, the CUNY Board of Trustees voted to make all 23 of their campuses tobacco-free which will be implemented no later than September 4, 2012. No additional information was collected from the CUNY schools.



Contact was made via phone to specific departments on college campuses. These departments included residential life, health/wellness services, and student affairs. If a targeted college representative was not available, a voice message was left detailing the process and explaining the purpose of the call. Follow up e-mails and calls were made accordingly to increase participation and acquire accurate information. Any information not received from a campus contact was gathered via online student handbooks found on official college websites. The handbook collection process helped to clarify answers from college representatives and, in some cases, used as a main source of tobacco policy information if responses from a college was delayed or never received. Also, a web-based version of the survey was developed via "Survey Monkey" for college contacts that preferred to answer online.

For the purpose of this analysis, it was assumed that the three colleges without any available data do allow tobacco use outside since that is the most common status and the minimum standard imposed by state law. Additionally, any college that reported having an active group sanctioned by the administration to discuss strengthening their tobacco policy was assumed to be "in-progress" of establishing a SF/TF policy on their grounds. It was also assumed that all online student handbooks referenced for data collection were up to date at the time of data collection.

## **RESULTS**

In New York State there are 194 colleges. ACS was able to acquire at least the current smoking policy at one hundred ninety-two or 98% of schools. In New York State, there are 194 colleges; 83 public and 111 private. Thirty-three colleges (17%) have adopted a completely smoke-free or tobacco-free campus policy (Table 1) while 45 (23%) of colleges were "in-progress or preparing to implement the policy in the near future. Overall 78 out of 194 or 40% of college campuses were either SF/TF or in the progress of pursuing a SF/TF policy. Private campuses in NYS were more likely to be SF/TF with 23 reporting a policy in place while 10 public colleges met the criteria for a SF/TF campus policy.

When colleges were analyzed by type, SUNY, CUNY, or Private colleges (Table 2), CUNY schools had no campuses designated as SF/TF although all 23 CUNY campuses are in the progress of adopting a SF/TF policy by the next academic year.

Table 1	Public (	Colleges	Private	Colleges	Total		
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Total Colleges	83	43	111	57	194	100	
SF/TF	10	12	23	21	33	17	
SF/TF In Progress	36	43	9	8	45	23	
TOTAL SF/TF and In Progress	46	55	32	29	78	40	

**Fig. 1** – Tobacco-free or Smoke-free Colleges by Type of College

New York's public colleges are more likely to be in the process of establishing a new SF/TF policy. Overall, 43% of public colleges compared to 8% of private colleges reported having an active tobacco committee working on a SF/TF policy. This is important to note because there are nearly twice the number of private colleges in the state than there are SUNY schools. With 100% of CUNY schools and 22% of SUNY schools in-progress, the trend portends that more publically funded campuses will have SF/TF policies in place than private colleges in the coming years.

Table 2	SUNY Colleges		CUNY C	Colleges	Private (	Colleges	Total		
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Total Colleges	60	31	23	12	111	57	194	100	
SF/TF	10	17	0	0	23	21	33	17	
SF/TF in Progress	13	22	23	100	9	8	45	23	
TOTAL SF/TF <u>and</u> In Progress	23	39	23	100	32	29	78	40	

Table 2 – Tobacco-free or Smoke-free Colleges by Affiliation

These data were also analyzed by regions in New York State (see Table 3). Six regions were identified: (1) Greater Capital Region, (2) Southern Tier, (3) Western, (4) Greater New York City Metro/lower Hudson Valley (NYC Metro/HV), (5) Rochester/Finger Lakes, and (6) Central/Northern region. NYC Metro/HV has the highest number of SF/TF colleges with 13 followed by Western with 6 colleges. Two regions each have 5 SF/TF colleges, Greater Capital and Central/Northern. The Western region of the state has the highest proportion of colleges in NYS that are SF or TF (55%) followed by the Greater Capital and the Rochester/Finger Lakes Regions (both with 21%). Amazingly, 82% of Western region colleges are SF/TF or in progress.

Table 3	Greater Capital (1)		Southern Tier (2)		Western (3)		Greater New York City Metro/ Lower Hudson Valley (NYC Metro/HV) (4)		Rochester/Finger Lakes (5)		Central and Northern (6)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Number of Colleges	24	12	7	4	11	6	101	52	14	7	37	19
SF or TF	5	21	1	14	6	55	13	13	3	21	5	14
In process of going SF/TF (in Progress)	5	21	1	14	3	27	28	28	2	14	4	11
TOTAL SF/TF <u>and</u> In Progress	10	42	2	28	9	82	41	41	5	35	9	25

Table 3 - SF/TF Colleges By Region in New York State

In terms of those colleges that are in the process of working on SF/TF policies, NYC Metro/HV has the greatest number (28) largely because of the decision by CUNY to make their 23 colleges TF. Capital Region is the next most active area by number with 5 colleges identified as being in progress (21%).

## **DISCUSSION**

Over the past decade, numerous colleges in New York State have established policies that curb tobacco use and protect students and staff from secondhand smoke. The major finding of this study of New York State is that 33 or 17% of colleges have implemented SF/TF campus policies to date. That trend appears to be accelerating. In the past five years New York State has seen a sixteen-fold increase in SF/TF campus policies. Even more dramatic is the change in the number of colleges that are expecting to go TF on their campus in the near future. The data suggest that 40% of all colleges in the state will likely be SF/TF within the next few years. So far, 45 colleges are involved in a formal process to review and strengthen their tobacco policies. It is not unreasonable to assume that all of those colleges will establish SF/TF policies given that the majority of campuses already have designated smoking areas outside or smoking restrictions within 25-50 feet from and entranceway or buildings.

Colleges in the NYC Metro/HV area are more likely to be SF/TF or in progress. That is not surprising given that the area has the greatest number of colleges in the state (101) and many of them have little or no campus property where the policy would require enforcement. With fewer open areas and courtyards on campus where students or faculty would gather to smoke, colleges should have an easier time implementing SF/TF policies. The areas' position is also strengthened by the 23 schools within the CUNY system planning to become completely tobacco-free in 2012.

Approximately half of the campuses with 100% bans on smoking or tobacco use are SF and the other half has TF policies. However more tobacco-free policies have been established in the past two years compared to SF policies. The tobacco-free trend seems to reflect the desire to treat tobacco products consistently since all tobacco products are addictive and harmful. Colleges may also want to avoid potential smokeless tobacco problems on campus and the need to amend a smoke-free policy in the future.

The rapid pace of tobacco-free policy adoption in New York and elsewhere does raise questions about what may be driving the strong trend. The work of many tobacco control advocates and students over the past decade probably laid the groundwork for many of the changes. Statewide policy changes such as clean indoor air laws, tobacco tax increases, and tobacco self service display bans have helped to reduce smoking rates in all age groups, but especially among youth. Other factors creating a snow ball effect may include the benefit of having local tobacco-free models and competitive pressure if a similar college in the area adopts the policy, as well as significant changes in societal norms for smoking. In NYS the high school student

smoking rate has declined by more than 50% in the past decade to 12.6% <sup>9</sup> of youth so the opposition to a policy has been diminished while supporters of such a policy are more empowered. Also cost pressures and the need to identify savings in an economic downturn may also be reducing opposition from college leadership. Anecdotally, parents seem to be very supportive of tobacco-free

campus policies as well. More research is needed to identify the strongest predictors for the establishment of SF/TF campus polices and the impact of these policies on college communities.

With many new SF/TF policies being adopted, New York State may soon represent the largest voluntary uptake of SF/TF campus policies in the country. When the CUNY system implements their tobacco-free policy by the Fall of 2012 it will likely be the largest system of colleges to voluntarily adopt a tobacco-free campus rule. Likewise, the State University of New York has instituted a collaborative process to improve student and employee health and wellness. A system-wide tobacco-free campus policy is one possible outcome of this initiative. If this happens, SUNY would be the first statewide system of colleges to voluntarily adopt a tobacco-free policy on all 60 of their campuses. Notwithstanding what the SUNY system ultimately does, 18% of SUNY campuses are already SF/TF and more than a quarter of SUNY institutions are working towards implementing the policy in the future.

With so many of the state's colleges choosing to make their campuses SF/TF, the NYS legislature may eventually decide to mandate the policy for all public and private colleges as Iowa and Arkansas have done through legislation. A similar scenario took place in 2008 when the legislature and governor enacted a law after there was a clear trend in NYS colleges prohibiting smoking in residence halls.

The trend in SF/TF college campuses is the latest but perhaps one of the most salient steps toward a tobacco-free society. Colleges represent what has been called the latest battleground in the tobacco wars. New York has largely been successful at delaying smoking initiation among high school age children. Young adults are now major targets for the tobacco industry who count on attracting new legal customers as early as possible. SF/TF policies provide fewer opportunities for youth to become addicted, essentially weakening the tobacco industry's recruitment strategy. Moreover, tobacco use restrictions help to denormalize the behavior, further attenuating the impact of aggressive marketing by tobacco manufacturers and retailers.

With so many colleges choosing to develop tobacco-free policies, it is unfortunate that the state has cut nearly 50% from its Tobacco Control Program budget in recent years. Institutions of higher education need a great deal of guidance, support, and access to resources to transition to a tobacco-free environment. Consider the increased needs for training staff, signage, and consultation to enhance or create cessation services on campus and improve access to cessation pharmacotherapy treatments. All of these services, especially those pertaining to the college setting, have been cut or eliminated recently. Meanwhile, the state takes in more than \$1.5 billion each year from tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes but is spending only 4 cents on the dollar to help people quit, reduce secondhand smoke exposure, and assisting institutions like colleges to become tobacco free. Ost-saving initiatives like tobacco control should be spared and even expanded to reduce healthcare costs and boost productivity. New York should also consider following the lead of Arkansas and Iowa by requiring that all colleges have a tobacco-free campus policy

This study has some limitations. First, the data collected was largely self-reported by college staff. It is possible that some interviewees or respondents may have provided inaccurate information. However, when possible, the information was validated using other means such as an online student handbook or an individual in the tobacco control community who works with that particular school. Second, there may have been some inconsistencies between how data was collected and recorded. Finally, institutional changes seem to be happening quickly and a policy change process could have

been initiated in some colleges after being interviewed. Yet, that is not likely since the American Cancer Society works closely with the NYS Tobacco-free Community Partners who would likely be involved or at least hear about the policy change effort.

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