Russia

Background

- Population: 142.5 million
- GDP: $1.86 trillion
- Per Capita Income: $17,000
- International tobacco companies dominate Russia’s cigarette market, holding over 90% of the cigarette market share in Russia.
- Productivity losses due to tobacco-related premature deaths cost at least $24.7 billion annually, more than 3% of Russia’s GDP.
- Excise tax revenue from tobacco products produced and imported into Russia totaled $4.4 billion in 2011.
- In early 2012, a comprehensive tobacco control bill was being considered in the Duma, but its future was in doubt.
- Recent laws have constrained NGO and media activities. USAID and UNICEF were forced to leave Russia in late 2012.

Why greater focus was needed on establishing smoke-free worksites

The business community in Russia has not been active or supportive of tobacco control efforts. Two of the largest business associations support tobacco industry positions. However, a growing number of individual businesses are instituting 100% smoke-free workplace policies, which is seen as part of global trends in corporate responsibility and management. Tobacco control partners saw an opportunity to bring smoke-free business leaders together with media and government officials to counter industry claims that smoke free is bad for business and demonstrate business support for the Ministry of Health’s bill’s smoke-free provisions.

Key partners involved (from all sectors)

- Business Russia is one of Russia’s leading business associations, representing the country’s domestic medium size businesses (over 2500 members). Business Russia is now the leading public organization advocating for tobacco taxes (as a means to reduce Russia’s high payroll taxes).
- Business Russia is also supportive of provisions of the new tobacco control law, specifically the provisions covering smoke-free workplaces.
- GBCHealth was the organizing partner of the smoke-free workplaces roundtable in Moscow. Until its closure in 2012 due to USAID’s departure from the country (GBCHealth was funded by USAID in Russia). GBCHealth was a key convener of workplace health initiatives in Russia, with a large network of members representing a diverse range of domestic and multinational corporations.

- Ministry of Health (MOH) was tasked by the Russian government to implement FCTC policies. MOH
initiated the current initiative in tobacco control, drafting the Russian government’s policy statement on tobacco control, which then-Prime Minister Putin signed in 2010, and the comprehensive tobacco control just signed by now President Putin.

- WHO was an active partner with MOH and the Russian government, providing advice and expertise to officials to help them craft the best possible policies according to FCTC.
- The Interregional Confederation of Consumer Protection Societies (Russian acronym: KONFOP) is the country’s leading consumer rights organization and the most vocal civil society organization advocating for tobacco control. KONFOP works with all of the above partners to promote the strongest possible TC policies for Russia.

Actions taken

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK) collaborated with GBHealth to convene a roundtable and workshop for Russian business leaders to discuss, promote, and endorse SF workplace policies. GBHealth formally organized and hosted the event, with MOH, WHO, and Business Russia as co-hosts. CTFK provided content and logistical support and organized speakers for the event. The Global Smoke-free Partnership assisted CTFK in recruiting companies to attend the event, KONFOP led one of the roundtable discussions. A representative from US Department of Health and Human Services provided a comparative overview of smoke-free workplace policies in the United States and offered cooperation with Russian counterparts to develop common guidelines. Over 100 people attended, most representing significant Russian and multinational companies plus about 20 media outlets.

Outcomes

The forum ended with general agreement to sign and send a resolution expressing the business community’s support for a 100% smoke-free law. The resolution was sent to the President and Prime Minister, MOH, Duma, and the news media. Media interest was also high, with close to 100 pieces appearing in national print, broadcast, and electronic media. MOH came out energized by business support to hold firm on the comprehensive smoke-free provisions in the then proposed, now passed, legislation.

On February 25, 2013 Russian President Putin signed a sweeping tobacco control bill into law. The law requires 100 percent smoke-free indoor public places, including educational, medical, cultural, and sports facilities; government buildings; public transportation and terminals; shopping areas; and hospitality venues such as bars and cafes.

Lessons learned (obstacles, learning that can benefit other countries, etc.)

As a kick-off event to a larger campaign, this was a successful event, providing MOH with greater impetus to push for comprehensive smoke-free legislation. It also signaled a direction for continued advocacy among business leaders.

Unfortunately, subsequent policies rendered the Global Smoke-free Worksite Challenge initiative untenable in Russia. The Russian government’s expulsion of USAID and cancellation of all their projects forced GBHealth to close. Although cooperation between NGOs and business is further circumscribed by new legislation that makes NGO activity politically suspect, all other partners remain active and hopeful for the opportunities of the new tobacco-control law.

Benefits for each partner and for the country overall

MOH gained the most from the event, as they were energized and given clear support for smoke-free legislation by the business community. The event strengthened MOH’s image as a progressive force working to strengthen both public health and the economic viability of the country. Businesses were brought face to face for the first time to discuss smoke-free policies as a positive, economically friendly opportunity to promote public health, leading to continued public debate in favor of smoke-free policies.