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Smoking on the Margins? Assessing the health equity effects of a smoke-free law in parks and beaches

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Overview

The Board of Parks and Recreation in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada approved a smoke-free by-law for the city's parks, beaches, and facilities effective September 1, 2010. Policies that aim to limit secondhand smoke (SHS) exposure by restricting spaces where people can smoke have been shown to improve population health and garner support from the public, health professionals, and policy makers. Research suggests that indoor smoke-free by-laws may affect men and women differently, but little research has examined the effects of outdoor smoking bans on women, men and other subgroups. Such by-laws may have different effects because some people may not have the means to seek out alternative places to smoke, have access to resources to quit smoking, or have other sites for recreation. The aim of this study is to apply a health equity lens to examine the development, adoption, and implementation of Vancouver's smoke-free law.

Objectives

- To understand the health and health equity effects of a new outdoor smoke-free policy in parks and on beaches.
- To assess the differential impacts of the policy for diverse groups of women and men, in particular those with a high prevalence and susceptibility to smoking and SHS exposure.
- To understand how social, economic, and environmental factors influence women's and men's capacity to manage SHS exposure and tobacco use in parks and on beaches, and their compliance with the policy.
- To develop recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of future smoke-free policies and reduce any unintended contributions to health inequities.

Methodology

This study uses a mixed- methods approach, informed by Equity-focused health Impact Assessment, to generate a comprehensive understanding of a policy in context.

Using both qualitative and quantitative data, the study will:

- Examine the development and implementation of the smoke-free by-law;
- Assess public opinion regarding the introduction and implementation of the smoke-free by-law;
- Document the rates of compliance among park and beach users; and
- Describe the experiences of enforcing the by-law.

An equity lens will be applied to all components of the study to assess the differential effects of the by-law on sub-populations of smokers.



Policy Development and Implementation

In order to assess and appreciate the development, adoption, and implementation of the smoke-free by-law in Vancouver, the project will:

- Develop a conceptual framework to convey potential health equity implications.
- Conduct a policy analysis of the evolution of the smoke-free by-law in Vancouver.
- Draw comparisons from nearby jurisdictions of Kelowna and Surrey (which have instituted similar by-laws) and Penticton (which chose not to institute a by-law).
- Conduct key informant interviews to understand the progression of the policy with:
 - City Councillors
 - Park Board employees
 - Medical Experts
 - Community Activists
- The policy analysis is informed by:
 - Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework (1988, 2007).
 - UK Overseas Development Institute's Research Policy Framework (Crewe & Young 2002).
 - Equity-focused Health Impact Assessment (Mahoney et al. 2004).

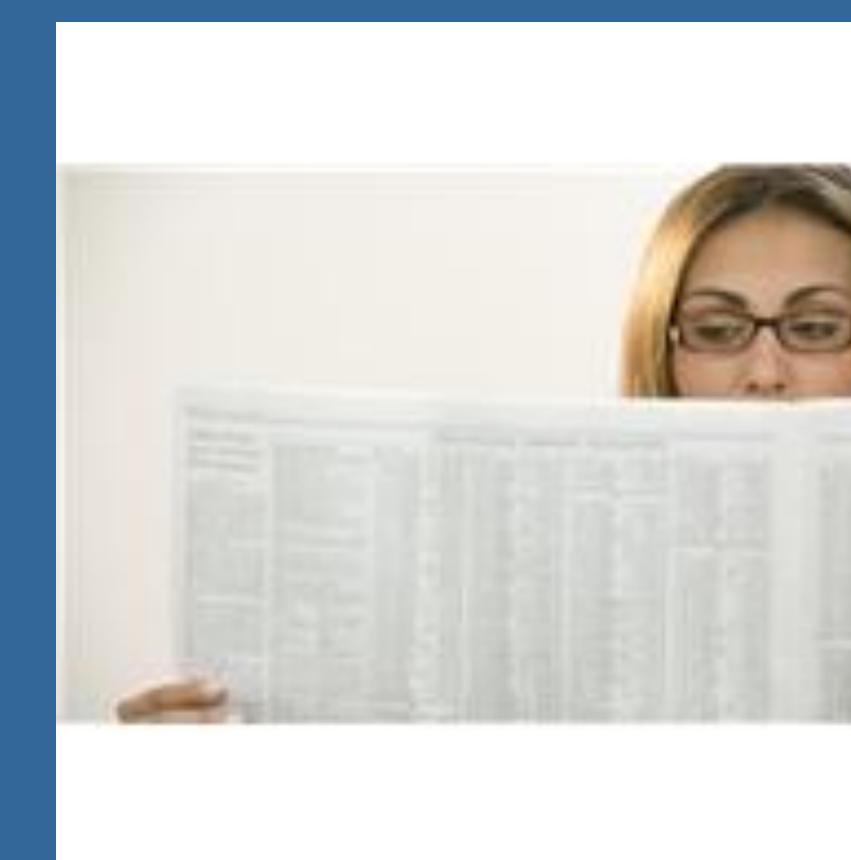


Public Opinion

Public opinion regarding the introduction and implementation of the smoke-free by-law will be examined via:

- A Vancouver-based population survey (Sept. 2011):
 - Random-digit-dialing of residents in Vancouver (n=500)
 - Obtained demographic information; smoking history; SHS exposure; opinion of by-law & behaviour change.
- Print media analysis to assess the potential effects of the media on public opinion. The media analysis will employ Agenda Setting and Framing Theory.
- Articles are eligible for inclusion if published between January 2010 - December 2011 inclusive from several BC newspapers, including:

- The Vancouver Sun*
- The Georgia Straight*
- The Surrey Leader*
- Kelowna Capital News*
- Penticton Western News*



Compliance

To determine compliance with the smoke-free by-law, the project is examining changes in patterns of smoking in selected parks and on selected beaches. This aspect of the project includes:

- Obtaining data pre- and post-law on smoking-related litter from the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup.
 - In 2010, 45.8% of all litter recovered on the BC shoreline was smoking-related (126,139 pieces of litter).
- An observational study at beaches and parks in Vancouver
 - Examining changes in frequency and location of smoking before and after the implementation of the by-law.
 - Carried out at a selection of parks (n=6) and beaches (n=3) over three summers.

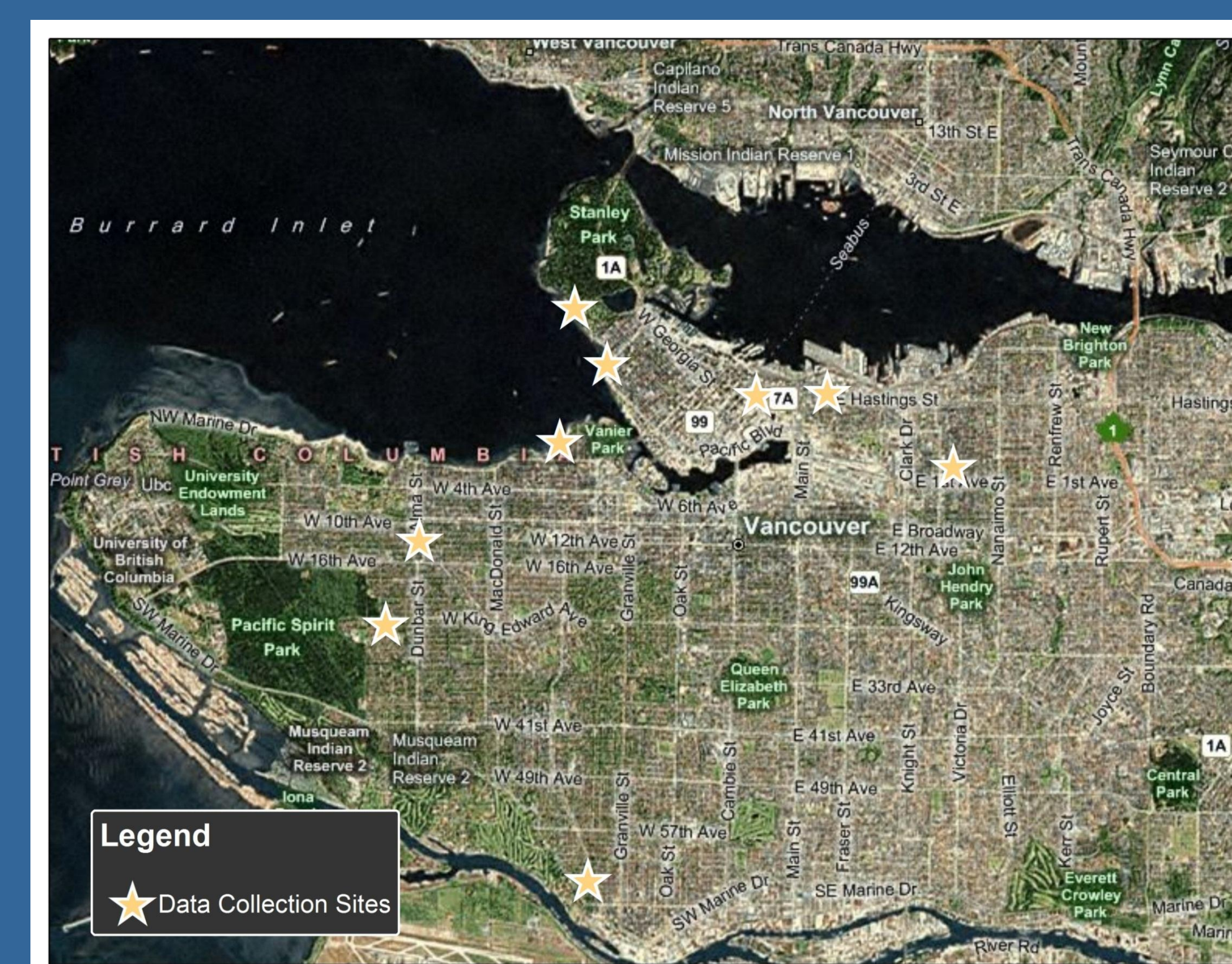


Figure 1. Observational Study Data Collection Sites



Enforcement

Enforcement of the by-law is carried out by Vancouver Park Rangers and Vancouver Police. There is a graduated system of warnings and the penalty is a \$250 fine. To understand the issues surrounding enforcement of the by-law, the project will:

- Use citation data from the summer months following implementation to examine citation patterns.
 - During Summer 2011 (May to September):
 - 39 tickets were issued
 - 57 written warnings were given
 - Frequencies of citations will be assessed by month and by venue of citation (low socioeconomic venue vs. high socioeconomic venue).
- Hold focus groups with enforcement officials to determine their perceptions on the changes in smoking patterns in parks and on beaches and their experiences of enforcement.
 - First focus group held October 2011 with 6 Park Rangers.
 - Rangers discussed shifts in their role – from 'ambassadors' to by-law enforcement officers.
 - This shift has generated both challenges and opportunities.



Conclusions

The development of effective, but feasible, smoke-free by-laws regarding restrictions on smoking in parks and on beaches should:

- Include a balanced approach that reduces SHS exposure;
- Support people who wish to quit smoking; and
- Not lead to stigmatization or marginalization of current smokers.

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