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Smoking Policies At Pacific Bell

By Michael Eriksen

With approximately 75,000 employees, Pacific Bell is the largest employer in the state of California. Like many employers, Pacific Bell is very concerned about the adverse health effects associated with smoking and is actively attempting to control smoking at the workplace. This article describes the health and economic costs and legal pressures which compel companies to be concerned about workplace smoking and the strategies available to manage this major health problem. Also described are the new corporate smoking policy and company-wide smoking-cessation program established at Pacific Bell, as well as the research conducted among Pacific Bell employees.

Health Effects of Smoking

The direct health effects of smoking are staggering. Cigarette smoking is widely recognized as the greatest preventable cause of premature death and disability in the United States. The Surgeon General's reports over the past 20 years have increasingly documented the strong connection between cancer, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It is currently estimated that at least 30 percent of all cancers, 25 percent of all cardiovascular disease, and 80 percent of deaths from respiratory disease are directly attributable to smoking.¹⁻³ In addition, 83 percent of all lung cancer is blamed on smoking. And the overall cancer death rate for male cigarette smokers is more than double that of nonsmokers. Each year, approximately 320,000 deaths are related to smoking and it is estimated that smoking costs the nation more than \$27 billion in medical care annually.⁴

Second-Hand Smoke

The adverse health effects of exposure to second-hand smoke are of increasing concern.⁵ It has been fairly well established that exposure to second-hand smoke has

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an adverse effect on the health of children, is an irritant to the senses, and can cause cardiovascular and respiratory disease.⁶⁻⁸

The major unanswered question regarding exposure to second-hand smoke is whether it can cause lung cancer. Recent studies in Japan, Greece, France, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania all indicate an increased risk of lung cancer among non-smoking spouses of cigarette smokers.⁹⁻¹⁴ In addition, a recent report from the Environmental Protection Agency states that up to one-third of all lung cancer in nonsmokers is caused by exposure to second-hand smoke. That could mean between 500 and 5000 lung-cancer deaths a year from passive smoking, depending upon the accuracy of the assumptions in the report.

The adverse health effects of exposure to second-hand smoke are of increasing concern. It has been fairly well established that exposure to second-hand smoke has an adverse effect on the health of children, is an irritant to the senses, and can cause cardiovascular and respiratory disease.

It is prudent, therefore, for business and industry to be concerned about the effects of passive smoking and to consider the recommendation of the Surgeon General in developing strategies for the control of second-hand smoke: "For the purposes of preventive medicine, prudence dictates that nonsmokers avoid exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke to the extent possible."¹⁶

The Economic Costs

In these days of rapidly escalating health-care costs, businesses are increasingly interested in effective health-care cost-containment strategies. In 1984, health care consumed nearly 12 percent of the Gross National Product; more than \$1 billion a day were spent on health care. Smoking has played a considerable part in these costs. The American public has spent more than \$930 billion on smoking-related medical costs and lost productivity since the first Surgeon General's report was published in 1964. In all, about 8.6 percent of the total national cost of illness is due to smoking-related disease.¹⁶ Thus, efforts to control workplace smoking can be an effective long-term way to contain health-care costs.

Costs to employers. Realizing that economic analyses can motivate decision-makers in business to take action, researchers have recently attempted to quantify the cost to employers of smoking employees. Dr. Marvin Kristein recently identified five "cost centers" to assess the employer's costs of smoking:

- insurance costs
- absenteeism costs
- productivity costs
- involuntary smoking costs
- occupational health costs.¹⁹

Analyzing expenses associated with these "cost centers," Kristein estimates that each smoker costs the employer an additional \$336 to \$601 a year strictly because of smoking. Another researcher, William Weis, who blames smoking for lowering the productivity of workers, estimates that a smoker costs a company over \$4,700 more a year than does a nonsmoker. It is apparent from these findings that a significant and unnecessary annual cost is borne to industry simply from having smoking employees on the payroll.

Costs to employees. Other researchers have estimated that the lifetime cost of smoking to the average 45-year-old, two pack-a-day male smoker is \$46,334 in medical expenses and premature disability and death. The benefit of quitting is \$24,690. Thus, smoking is costly to the individual as well as to the employer, and there are real economic benefits of quitting for both groups.

Anti-Smoking Laws

Legislative, judicial, administrative, and legal decisions at all levels of government have recently combined to increase business involvement in workplace smoking controls. At least eight states have already passed workplace smoking-control legislation. But the real legislative momentum is at the local level, particularly in California, where at least 25 local jurisdictions have enacted ordinances restricting workplace smoking in private businesses. Approximately 50 percent of Pacific Bell employees now work in local jurisdictions which have workplace smoking-control ordinances. Corporations around the country can expect an increasing number of local jurisdictions to pass ordinances which restrict employees' smoking.

The ordinances, however, are but one form of pressure against workplace smoking. A number of other legal actions have already been successfully pursued by nonsmokers who want relief from workplace or public smoking. The only legal maneuver which has consistently failed is the appeal for a Constitutional right to a smoke-free environment. Among the successful legal remedies:

- Employers' common-law duty to provide a safe and healthy workplace
- Entitlement to early disability and retirement benefits
- Entitlement to worker's compensation benefits
- Entitlement to unemployment benefits
- Protection from wrongful discharge
- Reasonable accommodation due to handicap.

state and local legislative action, as well as judicial and administrative findings are increasingly reinforcing the rights of nonsmokers in the workplace. This trend, combined with the medical and economic costs of smoking, create a compelling rationale for corporations to aggressively control workplace smoking.

The Legal Remedies

Following is a list of some of the legal and administrative decisions protecting the rights of nonsmokers:

Common Law Duty to Provide a Safe and Healthful Workplace

- *Shimp vs. New Jersey Bell Telephone Co.*
- *Smith vs. Western Electric*
- *Gordon vs. Raven Systems and Research Co.*

Entitlement to Early Disability and Retirement Benefits

- *Parodi vs. Merit Systems Protection Board*

Entitlement to Worker's Compensation Benefits

- *Fuentes vs. Worker's Compensation Appeals Board*
- *Brooks vs. Trans World Airlines*

Entitlement to Unemployment Benefits

- *Alexander vs. CA Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board*
- *Gibson vs. Starkist*
- *Apell vs. Moorestown (N.J.) Board of Education*

Protection from Wrongful Discharge

- *Henzel vs. The Singer Company*
- *Gibson vs. Starkist*

Reasonable Accommodation Due to Handicap

- *Vickers vs. Veterans Administration*
- *Pletten vs. U.S. Army*

It is clear, then, that state and local legislative action, as well as judicial and administrative findings are increasingly reinforcing the rights of nonsmokers in the workplace. This trend, combined with the medical and economic costs of smoking, create compelling rationale for corporations to aggressively control workplace smoking.

Two questions immediately arise, however, (1) What can corporations do? (2) How will corporate controls be viewed by both smoking and nonsmoking employees?

Pacific Bell Survey

Concerned about the issue of workplace smoking, but knowing neither the magnitude of the problem nor the acceptability of possible solutions to employees, Pacific Bell conducted an employee smoking survey in November, 1982. Its objectives were to determine:

- Prevalence of smoking among employees
- Extent of the problem from second-hand smoke
- Perceived effect of a smoking policy.

A 25-question survey was developed and distributed to more than 3,600 employees through the company mail. In all, 2,942 employees completed and returned the questionnaire, a response rate of 81 percent.

The survey found that:

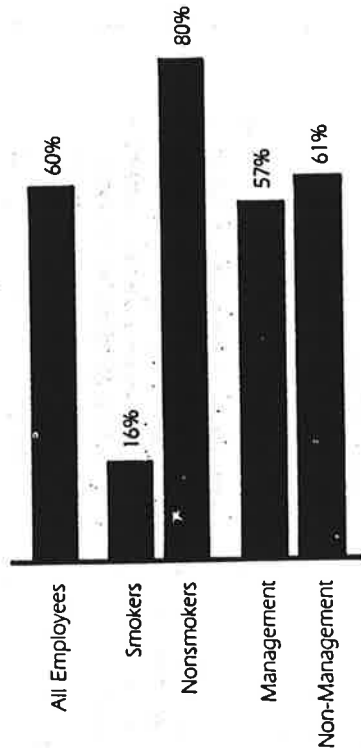
- 33 percent of employees currently smoked (31 percent, cigarettes; 2 percent, pipes and cigars).
- 26 percent were ex-smokers.
- 41 percent never smoked.

These percentages are similar to national figures for adults, according to 1982 data from the National Center for Health Statistics. Thus, the smoking behavior of Pacific Bell employees resembled that of adults throughout the country and was probably similar to the smoking habits of workers in other large, nonmanufacturing industries.

As Figure 1 displays, when employees were asked to what extent they were bothered by smoking at work, 80 percent of the nonsmokers and 16 percent of smokers said they were either "always, frequently, or occasionally" bothered by smoking. Eye irritation was the most frequently reported complaint (66 percent), followed by clothing smells (61 percent), and concern for long-term health effects (58 percent).

Figure 1
Extent to Which Employees Are Bothered by Smoking at Work*

(N = 2942)



*Always, Frequently, or Occasionally Bothered by Smoking

Figure 2 indicates that 73 percent of all employees (53 percent of the smokers and 83 percent of the nonsmokers) felt that the company should be concerned about smoking at the workplace. Thus, it appeared that corporate involvement in smoking control was favored by the majority of both smokers and nonsmokers.

A smoking policy clarifies the corporate position on workplace smoking and provides support for the adjudication of disputes between smokers and nonsmokers. The rationale for developing such a policy appears to be moving away from mere protection of equipment and products and moving toward protecting employee health.

In the survey, 80 percent of nonsmokers and 51 percent of smokers said there should either be a total ban on smoking or that it should be restricted to designated areas. Of significant interest, 13 percent of the smokers said they would try to quit, while 38 percent said they would smoke less if there were a corporate smoking policy. Thus, more than one-half of the smokers surveyed indicated that a smoking policy would have a positive impact on their smoking behavior.

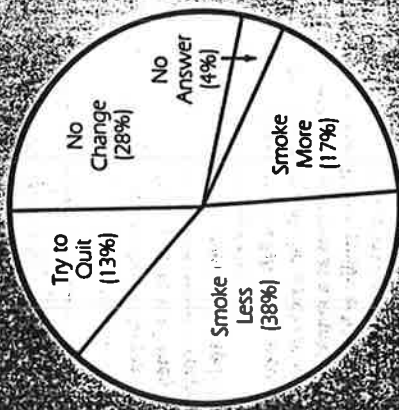
In addition, 64 percent of all employees felt that the company should offer smoking-cessation programs while 44 percent of the smokers said they would attend such a program. An attendance rate of 44 percent at a smoking-cessation program would be extremely high and may be difficult to actually achieve. However, reaching even one-half or one-third of this figure would still have a significant impact upon the prevalence of workplace smoking and employee health.

Figure 2
Percent Who Feel the Company Should Be Concerned About Smoking at the Workplace

(N = 2942)



Figure 3
Anticipated Effect of Policy on Overall Smoking Behavior
 (N = 971)



Pacific Bell's employee smoking survey showed convincingly that workplace smoking was a widespread problem and that both smokers and nonsmokers were in favor of company action to curb it. The survey also demonstrated that a corporate smoking policy would reduce smoking and that there was significant employee interest in workplace smoking-cessation programs.

Corporate Smoking Policy

Armed with this data, Pacific Bell proceeded to develop a workplace smoking-control program by establishing a corporate smoking policy and a company-wide smoking-cessation program.

Corporate smoking policies are generally but one element in an overall attempt to manage workplace smoking. A smoking policy clarifies the corporate position on workplace smoking and provides support for the adjudication of disputes between smokers and nonsmokers. The rationale for developing such a policy appears to be moving away from mere protection of equipment and products and moving toward protecting employee health.²³ Among the reasons companies are establishing smoking policies today:

- Anticipating demands from nonsmokers
- Assisting managers in easing conflicts
- Avoiding inconsistencies in corporate statements on employee welfare
- Assisting in corporate health-care cost containment.²⁴

At Pacific Bell, a concern for employee health and the anticipation of a greater number of smoking ordinances led to the adoption of a corporate-wide smoking policy in April,

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1984. The policy tries to accommodate the preferences of both nonsmokers and smokers, as much as possible. Smoking is allowed only when it does not endanger life or property, or cause discomfort or unreasonable annoyance to other employees. This policy has the following provisions:

- Smoking continues to be prohibited in all work locations already under smoking restrictions.
- Employees may designate their private office as either smoking or nonsmoking areas.
- In shared work areas, an effort should be made to accommodate individual preferences, as much as possible.
- If separation and/or cooperation do not work in shared work areas, smoking may be banned there as a last resort.
- Smoking may be prohibited in conference rooms, classrooms, and auditoriums unless all in attendance agree to allow it.
- Responsibility for enforcement of this policy lies with local management.

Developing a Smoking Policy

In developing a smoking policy, the objectives should be determined in advance. There is little published evidence that a smoking policy will result in smoking cessation among employees, although Pacific Bell's survey suggests that this is a perceived outcome among smokers.

Once the objectives have been determined, a policy can be developed which is both effective and enforceable.

- The policy should have specific restrictions and should provide as much protection to nonsmokers as possible.
- Provisions for enforcing the policy should be included in the body and it should be clearly stated whether there will be any disciplinary actions for noncompliance.
- Authority for problem resolution should be assigned to local managers, who are knowledgeable of the work environment and the feasibility of various solutions. But employees should also be involved in the resolution of problems.
- The policy should be clear in its intent and both flexible and consistent.

Companies interested in establishing a corporate smoking policy need not start from scratch. A number of existing policies can be reviewed and revised to meet your company's own particular needs and employee requirements. A "Model Policy for Smoking in the Workplace" was developed at the 1981 National Conference on Smoking OR Health and is available through local units of the American Cancer Society. Additional model policies are reprinted in the publication *A Smokefree Workplace*, available from the California Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, 2054 University Ave., Suite 500, Berkeley, Calif. 94709, 415-831-3032.

Smoking-Cessation Programs

One of the major objectives of a workplace smoking-control program should be to reduce the prevalence of smoking among employees. This objective can best be achieved through smoking-cessation programs. Such programs not only reduce the overall

amount of smoking in the workplace, they also help make corporate smoking restrictions more palatable to employees.

But perhaps the biggest benefit is to the individual smoker. If an individual stops smoking, his or her mortality ratio declines as the years of nonsmoking increase.²⁵ After 15 years of nonsmoking, mortality ratios for ex-smokers resemble those for individuals who never smoked.²⁶ The bottom line is that people benefit from giving up cigarettes, regardless of their age, sex, or the amount they smoked.²⁷

About 15 percent of U.S. corporations currently offer workplace smoking-cessation programs, while 33 percent would like to either expand their programs or develop new ones, according to a recent representative survey.²⁸

Researchers have recommended that worksite programs incorporate the most successful elements of community smoking-cessation programs, such as emphasizing maintenance after cessation and analyzing the behavior associated with smoking, as well as building upon the uniqueness of the workplace, by providing a peer-support network and possible corporate reinforcements for not smoking.²⁹

Developing a Cessation Program

Once a corporation decides to help its employees quit smoking, the question becomes how to help. There are numerous smoking-cessation programs available today, but many are of questionable effectiveness.³⁰ Corporations should consult with the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, and the American Heart Association for help in choosing a quality smoking-cessation program. These volunteer agencies also generally provide their own programs.

In addition, guidelines are beginning to be developed to help employers select quality smoking-cessation programs. Model guidelines have already been established by the state of Maine and by Healthworks Northwest of Puget Sound.^{31,32} California's Department of Health Services is also currently developing guidelines.

A number of smoking-cessation interventions have been attempted at Pacific Bell. During the past few years, the company has worked successfully with the American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association in providing effective interventions. In addition, Pacific Bell also arranged for Smokers to conduct workplace programs during implementation of the San Francisco smoking ordinance.

Until now, however, no systematic, company-wide program was available to members. This year, Pacific Bell, in cooperation with Region 2 of the Telephone Pioneers of America, is launching a major in-house smoking-cessation effort for active and retired employees, as well as dependents. About 1,000 people are expected to take part the first year. The Telephone Pioneers, comprised of past and present Bell System employees who were with the system at least 17 years, is the largest social and philanthropic organization in the country. In January, 1985, 17 Pioneer volunteers were trained as smoking-cessation group leaders and will be conducting programs throughout the state. Training was based on the "Smokeless" smoking-cessation program developed by the American Institute for Preventive Medicine in Southfield, Michigan.

Good Business

The medical, economic, and legal issues surrounding smoking combine to make workplace smoking control an idea whose time has come. By protecting nonsmokers

and helping smokers to change their unhealthy behaviors, a workplace smoking-control program is a sign of good business. We believe corporations should consider developing in-house smoking-cessation programs, like the one at Pacific Bell. Although such in-house programs may not be right for all companies, such as those without trained medical staff, in many companies they can provide less-expensive, higher-quality programs than community cessation programs.

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