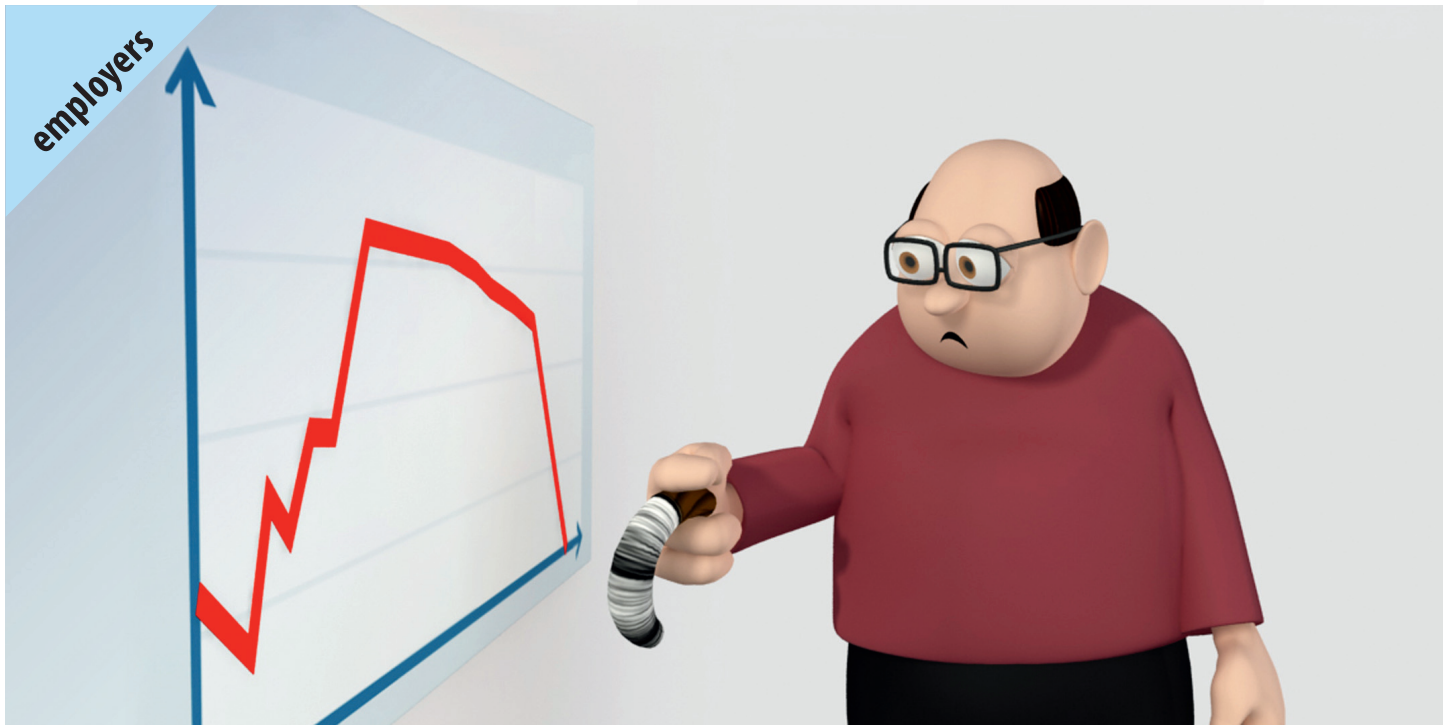




Health effects of tobacco smoke exposure

In order to protect non-smokers at work, and to encourage smokers to quit smoking, recent European recommendations have been made to promote smoke-free environments. Workplace smoking bans have been implemented in several EU countries. Nevertheless in some places employees are still exposed to Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS). Moreover, there are great differences between European states regarding this issue as shown in a 2009 survey by the European Commission. In Greece, 60% of the respondents reported being exposed to ETS at the workplace. In contrast, the lowest number was found in the UK, Finland and Sweden with around 10% of people reporting this problem.

ETS exposure, also known as second hand smoke exposure, is a significant cause of illness, disability and mortality in the EU. Occupational ETS exposure refers to the exposure of tobacco smoke at the workplace.

Be aware that:

- There is a 20–30% increased risk of developing lung cancer when one is exposed to ETS.
- People who already have problems such as asthma or chronic pulmonary disease may be at an increased risk of developing problems from ETS exposure.
- Involuntary smoking increases the risk of heart attack by 25–35%. The cardiovascular effects of even brief periods (minutes to hours)

of passive smoking may be nearly as significant (80%–90%) as those of chronic active smoking.

- Women who are exposed to ETS during pregnancy have an increased risk of giving birth to babies with lower birth weights, congenital disorders and reduced lung functions. Exposure to ETS also increases the chance of a child developing asthma.



Economic aspects of smoking at work

- Smoking is cost-intensive. Figures show that smokers tend to be more often on long-term and short-term sick leave than non-smokers and ex-smokers. Smokers are less productive at work when they take cigarette breaks. Fire damage caused by smoking materials as well as additional cleaning and maintenance expenses also add to the costs of smoking at work.
- The health effects of ETS on non-smokers are also substantial and lead to an increase in the cost borne by businesses due to smoking.
- Operating premises where smoking is allowed has several risks. The cost of fire insurance is higher. Employees may file a claim if they suffer adverse health effects.

Smoking in the workplace: commonly held beliefs

- Engineers agree that contrary to popular belief there is no ventilation system capable of completely eliminating smoke. This means that indoor smoking areas will always pollute the air of non-smoking rooms.
- Locating smoking areas around the doorways, windows or vents of buildings also leads to occupational ETS exposure caused by the draft effect.
- Smoking rooms do not prevent the exposure of workers to ETS. Cleaning staff work in these premises during their working hours and have to breathe the polluted air.
- Despite the commonly held belief, smoke-free legislation does not adversely affect the catering industry. Several studies comparing figures before and after the smoking ban in the EU and in the USA found that sales may even increase.

Creating a smoke-free working environment

The best way for employers to support and protect their workers is by establishing a holistic smoke-free policy including a smoking cessation programme as well as a total smoking ban on the company premises:

First step: encourage and support smokers to quit

- Emphasise the damage smoking cause and motivate smokers to stop by highlighting the advantages of a life without smoking.
- A range of different smoking-cessation programmes may be paid by insurance companies. It could be helpful to ask smokers to contribute a small amount to the fees so they are committed to the courses offered. It could be beneficial to allow employees to take part in the courses during their working time to increase motivation.



Second step: implement a total smoking ban

If certain recommendations are followed, compliance with smoking bans is usually high and all smokers as well as non-smokers normally support such policies.

Several key principles help to smoothly implement such a policy and ensure success:

- Emphasise the health damages caused by ETS exposure and the individual's right to work in an ETS free environment.

- Establish a committee for supervising all measures and a smooth introduction by:
 - Involving employees in the implementation process and having support from employees' representatives;
 - Getting full commitment from the senior management through their participation in the committee.
- Formulate and distribute a written policy that will affirm the new rules. It should include clear indications regarding the purpose of the policy.
- Draw up a timeline indicating the different steps to be taken, consequences of non-compliance as well as the contact persons for answering questions related to the policy.
- Offer free smoking-cessation programmes and recurrent consultation possibilities to encourage successful quitting attempts.
- Provide training and background information for managers, supervisors and workers' representatives.
- Do not allow any exceptions within company premises once the ban is implemented.
- Be aware of possible negative consequences of a smoking ban, e.g. an increased risk of fire due to attempts to smoke in secret.

Long-term planning and information on the implementation of a smoking ban is necessary to allow all employees to prepare for the new conditions. Several months of preparation should be scheduled.

More information:

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Preventing a negative impact of tobacco smoke in the workplace:

<http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/whp/preventing-a-negative-impact-of-tobacco-smoke-in-the-workplace>

Napo film on tobacco smoke:

<http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/whp/smoke-at-work>

Read also the leaflets *Advice for smokers* and *Advice for non-smokers*.



Worth to know: the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Consumers has launched in 2011 a new anti-tobacco campaign called "Ex-Smokers Are Unstoppable". This 3 year campaign features an extremely effective tool to help smokers quit. iCoach is a free access digital health coaching platform available in all the official EU languages. Unlike other digital health tools, the iCoach also focuses on those unwilling to quit and those with a high relapse risk. Results are impressive with some 30% who start the programme actually quitting. For more information: www.exsmokers.eu