

Appendix 9.1: Media Advocacy in Ireland

*This case study is taken from *The medical case for clean air in the home, at work and in public places, A report on passive smoking by the Tobacco Advisory Group of the Royal College of Physicians, July 2005*, found at <http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/brochure.aspx?e=4>.*

On March 29, 2004, Ireland became the first country in the world to introduce comprehensive legislation making all enclosed workplaces, including bars and restaurants, smoke-free.^{1,2} Implementation proved to be extremely popular and successful.³ In a one-year review of the legislation, 96 percent of all indoor workers reported that they currently worked in smoke-free areas.⁴ This case study highlights the use of paid and earned media by health departments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to build acceptance and enforcement of the smoke-free air law. To read the full case study of the media advocacy efforts supporting the Irish workplace law, see chapter 15 of *The medical case for clean air in the home, at work and in public places, A report on passive smoking by the Tobacco Advisory Group of the Royal College of Physicians, July 2005*, (weblink cited above).

As background, a new tobacco bill published in 2001 gave the Minister for Health and Children the power to create smoke-free workplaces.¹ It was supported by the opposition parties and signed into law in 2002. Further discussions continued on how widely restrictions on smoking in the workplace should extend. To help that debate, the newly established Office on Tobacco Control (OTC) and the Health and Safety Authority commissioned independent scientists to review the evidence on workplace passive smoking. They concluded that secondhand smoke was harmful, that employees needed to be protected in the workplace, and that legislative measures were needed.⁶ At the launch of this report on January 30, 2003, the Minister for Health and Children, Micheál Martin TD, announced that he would make the necessary orders to ensure that all enclosed workplaces, including bars, would become smoke-free on January 1, 2004. Various technical issues delayed the implementation of the legislation until March 2004.

During the period between the announcement of the legislation and its implementation, three distinct groups of governmental and non-governmental organizations were prominent in their support for the legislation: the Minister for Health and Children and other politicians; the public service sector including the OTC, the Department of Health and Children, the Health and Safety Authority and the Regional Health Authorities; and the NGOs, most notably Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Ireland, the Irish Cancer Society, the Irish Heart Foundation and the MANDATE trade union, which represents hospitality workers. Together with others, these groups played different but significant roles in promoting consistent arguments:

- Passive smoking (or secondhand smoke) is a significant health and safety issue.
- Passive smoking is a serious cause of ill health.
- All workers, including hospitality workers, deserve protection.
- Ventilation will not remove the harmful constituents of passive smoke.
- Separate smoking areas do not work—smoke cannot read.
- Smokers are reasonable people and most want to quit.
- Assistance should be readily available to help smokers quit if they wish to.

In addition, all parties were clear that the primary objective of the legislation was to protect workers from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. The smoke-free legislation was not presented as a means of protecting the public, or encouraging smokers to quit smoking or reduce tobacco use. Thus, it was held that if the public—patrons of a hospitality venue, for instance—benefit from smoke-free workplaces, or if smokers cut down or quit smoking as a result of the ban, these would be welcome consequences but not central objectives of the legislation.

ASH Ireland, the Irish Cancer Society and the Irish Heart Foundation combined resources to mount a public health media advocacy campaign in favor of the smoke-free initiative, and to provide leadership and support for other NGOs wishing to be involved. In addition, many healthcare professional organizations such as the Irish College of General Practitioners and the Environmental Health Officers' Association, and support NGOs such as the Asthma Society, supported and contributed to the media campaign.

The OTC played a key role, not only in advocating the smoke-free initiative, but also in running a campaign to build public compliance with the smoke-free workplace legislation. They ensured that the experiences of those charged with enforcing similar legislation elsewhere, especially New York and Boston, were brought to the attention of all concerned in Ireland. They were also responsible, in association with the Health and Safety Authority, for ensuring that all the necessary information and signage was available to those who were expected to enforce the legislation when it came to be implemented.⁷

From the Department of Health and Children, the Chief Medical Officer issued an unambiguous view of the potential health impact of the legislation, which was reported widely in the media.⁸ The Department also ran a multimedia campaign entitled "Every cigarette is doing you damage" to highlight the harmful effects of smoking on the individual, and they ensured that adequate support was made available in advance of the legislation for those who wished to quit smoking. Additional smoking cessation staff and an enhanced national telephone quitline with back-up support were provided in association with the Irish Cancer Society and local health authorities. A dedicated Web site was launched to deal with all aspects of the legislation and to provide the public with clear answers to their many questions concerning its implementation.⁹

Under the smoke-free legislation, a person who smokes in a designated smoke-free area and the owner, manager or person in charge of the area are both guilty of an offence, punishable by fines of up to €3,000 (approximately \$4,000 USD) if convicted in a court of law.¹ To assist with the implementation of the smoke-free legislation, and to maximize compliance with the law, the OTC launched a television and radio advertising campaign to raise awareness about the introduction of smoke-free workplaces. The campaign included repeated broadcasts of two 20-second television advertisements and a 20-second radio advertisement, plus print advertisements in various trade publications.¹⁰ Phase one of the campaign was launched at the beginning of March and focused on announcing the commencement of smoke-free workplaces on March 29. Phase two, launched on March 29, focused on building compliance with the new legislation, and provided details of a local telephone number for reporting episodes of non-compliance.

To support and, where necessary, enforce compliance, the OTC¹¹ and the Health and Safety Authority¹² prepared detailed guidance notes and signage for employers.¹³

On March 29, 2004, the day the smoke-free initiative was enacted, all three national broadsheet newspapers (*The Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Examiner*) and the three main tabloid newspapers (*the Sun*, *Mirror* and *Star*) carried positive stories on the ban on their front page, and all editorialized in favor of the initiative. A series of media

events were organized throughout the day, starting with “Ireland’s first smoke-free breakfast” at 8 a.m. in a popular city centre restaurant. High levels of compliance with the ban were apparent immediately to the environmental health officers and the health and safety inspectors charged with enforcing the ban, and were confirmed by the media reporters dispatched far and wide to find bar owners or customers who were prepared to defy the ban. Instances of non-compliance, even in bars in the toughest neighborhoods and in rural locations, were few. Within a month of the ban, it was reported that a 97 percent compliance rate had been achieved in all workplaces, including bars.¹⁴

As of 2005, there was extensive public support for the legislation among smokers and nonsmokers. The public opinion survey conducted for the OTC in advance of the one-year anniversary of the law showed that:

- 93 percent think the law is a good idea, including 80 percent of smokers.
- 96 percent of people feel the law is successful, including 89 percent of smokers.
- 98 percent believe that workplaces are now healthier because of the smoke-free law, including 94 percent of smokers.⁴

Despite much negative rhetoric from vested interests surrounding the introduction of the smoke-free initiative in Ireland, the impact that it had on the Irish population was perhaps best captured on a program broadcast on national television on New Year’s Day 2005. Market research carried out for the program, “2004: How was it for you?” found that from a list of 30 positive events that happened in Ireland in 2004, including many memorable international sporting achievements, the implementation of the smoke-free initiative in all workplaces topped the poll, and by a clear 15 percent more than the second-place event.

Several factors are likely to have contributed to this success. One of these factors was the 14-month media debate in advance of the legislation being implemented. It was estimated that in that time period, media coverage of the smoke-free legislation filled in excess of 20 million words, equivalent to some 10,000 pages of newsprint, and 2,000 hours of national and local broadcast time.¹⁵ The media coverage and the consistent messages about protecting the health of workers were crucial in establishing public understanding and support for the legislation.

References

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