

Media Release



Embargoed:
10:30am, Thursday 29th April 2004

*Building a
Cancer Smart
Community*

5 lives lost in NSW for every month smoking bans are delayed

An estimated 5 pub and club workers in NSW may be dying from heart disease or lung cancer each month as a result of their workplace exposure to tobacco smoke, according to a new study commissioned by The Cancer Council NSW.

The study, by international expert Professor James Repace, uses monitored smoke levels in Sydney clubs along with workforce and medical data to develop accurate estimates of deaths from heart disease and lung cancer caused by passive smoking at work.

“It is outrageous that pubs and clubs are still dragging their feet on total smoking bans when we know that at least five lives are being lost a month. It is especially concerning given that a task force in 1997 recommended the banning of smoking in all indoor venues,” said Cancer Council NSW CEO Dr Andrew Penman.

“Even if the levels of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) across the week were half those assumed in the report, there would still be more than 30 bar workers dying in NSW each year – greater than any other single cause of workplace-related mortality.

“The only figures we previously had on passive smoking deaths were the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) figures, which are only based on domestic exposure of the spouses of smokers and do not include accurate measurements of levels of toxins. This study is a much more accurate interpretation based on hard data and consistent with recent international research.”

A recent study published in the *British Medical Journal* emphasised the health benefits of total bans, showing that during a six-month smoking ban in pubs and clubs in Montana, average hospital admissions for heart disease dropped from 40 to 24. New Zealand researchers recently estimated there were 347 deaths per year in that country due to ETS exposure in the home.

“Unions and the industry should consider a system of surveillance to investigate deaths of hospitality workers from smoking-related diseases so workers who develop an ETS-related disease can be appropriately identified and informed, and adequately compensated for this occupational illness,” Dr Penman said.

“There are many reasons why these cases are under-reported at the moment, including a low level of awareness about the link between heart disease and occupational smoke exposure.”

The author of the report, Professor James Repace, is based at the Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, Massachusetts and has published 60 scientific papers on environmental tobacco smoke. The risk analysis method he used is consistent with the Environmental Tobacco Smoke Harm Index published in the Australian Standard.

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