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Indoor Air Pollution 89% Lower in Smoke-Free Areas

A new global air quality study shows that indoor air pollution is 89 percent lower in places that are smoke-free compared to those where smoking is allowed. Anti-tobacco groups say the findings underscore the need for comprehensive smoke-free workplace laws.

The study was conducted by researchers at the Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, N.Y., the International Agency for Research on Cancer and the Harvard School of Public Health, and was funded by the Flight Attendant Medical Research Institute and the National Institutes of Health.

The study measured air pollution levels in 1,280 restaurants, bars, transportation outlets and other places in 24 countries, including Ireland and New Zealand where there are nationwide laws making all indoor workplaces smoke-free, including restaurants and bars. The study found that across each type of place, the lowest levels of indoor air pollution were found in smoke-free places.

The five countries with the highest average levels of air pollution were Syria, Romania, Lebanon, Belgium and Singapore. Those with the lowest were the smoke-free countries of Ireland and New Zealand, followed by Canada, where provincial laws result in the majority of venues being smoke-free.

While there were some differences between countries, the average indoor air pollution levels in venues where smoking was permitted were dangerously high and were comparable across different regions of the world.

Tobacco critics say the findings indicate that countries ratifying the World Health Organization (WHO) international tobacco control treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), will benefit from implementing the secondhand smoke provisions of the treaty.

The treaty calls on countries to protect all persons from exposure to tobacco smoke. According to the treaty, this protection should include "indoor workplaces, public transport, indoor public places and other public places." The treaty has been signed by 168 countries and ratified by 139 countries; however, the United States has not ratified the treaty.

"This study is a serious reminder of the urgency for every country that has ratified the FCTC to enact the smoke-free provisions of the treaty," said Mary Assunta, chair of the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA), an alliance of over 200 non-governmental organizations from more than 90 countries that support

the tobacco treaty.

"No one should have to endure the serious health risks caused by secondhand smoke in order to earn a paycheck or simply by being in a public place. We hope this study helps to accelerate the growing movement to enact strong smoke-free laws that protect everyone's right to breathe clean air."

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