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Policies on Smoking in Wisconsin County and Municipal Buildings and Vehicles

In 2006, the Wisconsin Tobacco Prevention and Control Plan established a goal that all municipal government buildings, facilities, and vehicles will be smoke-free by December 31, 2008.

In an effort to monitor progress towards that goal, the University of Wisconsin Paul P. Carbone Comprehensive Cancer Center Tobacco Surveillance and Evaluation Program, with support from the Department of Health and Family Services Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, conducted a census survey of all county and municipal governments regarding their written and unwritten policies on smoking in government buildings and vehicles.

Major Findings:

- **As of January, 2006, approximately one-half of all counties and municipalities in Wisconsin had written policies banning smoking in all government buildings.**
- **Counties were most likely to ban smoking in all of their government buildings, followed by cities, villages, and towns.**
- **More than three-fourths of all counties and municipalities reported that smoking never occurs in their government buildings.**
- **Many towns and villages rely on unwritten policies or general understandings to reduce smoking in their government buildings.**
- **Less than one-third of all counties and municipalities had written policies banning smoking in their government vehicles.**

Background

The elimination of workplace exposure to secondhand smoke is a priority of the Wisconsin Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, local public health departments, and community anti-tobacco coalitions across the state. Because government offices are, by their nature, public places, the 2006 Wisconsin Tobacco Prevention and Control Plan, developed by state, regional and local tobacco control leaders, established a goal that all municipal government buildings, facilities, and vehicles will be smoke-free by December 31, 2008.

Methods

In January and February of 2006, a survey was sent to the clerks of all counties, cities, villages and towns in Wisconsin (N=1,923) to assess policies regarding smoking in county and municipally owned or leased buildings and vehicles, and compliance with those policies. The survey assessed whether counties and municipalities had written ordinances/policies on smoking in their buildings, and whether the ordinances/policies banned smoking in *all* buildings, banned smoking in *some* buildings, or restricted smoking to designated areas. The current survey was similar to four surveys previously conducted in 1996, 1997, 2001 and 2003, with one exception. The previous surveys did not specify whether the policies were written, or simply a general understanding. To account for this difference, the 2006 survey assessed whether counties and municipalities that did not have a written policy in place, had an unwritten policy, or general understanding, that smoking was not allowed in government buildings. (For additional methodological information, please see the technical notes at the end of this brief.)

Results

As of January, 2006, counties were the unit of government most likely to ban smoking in all buildings using a written ordinance/policy, with 80% doing so (see **Figure 1**). Towns were least likely to have written policies banning smoking in all government buildings (43%). A significant minority (19%) of counties and cities had policies that restricted smoking to certain locations. Towns were most likely to have no written policies in place (49%).

Figure 2 reveals that all counties and municipalities were less likely to have written ordinances/policies that banned smoking in government vehicles, compared to government buildings. Counties (63%) were more likely to have written policies banning smoking in vehicles than cities (55%), villages (42%), or towns (25%).

Figure 3 demonstrates that despite differences in the degree to which written policies banning smoking were enacted among the different units of government, there was little variation in reports of smoking ever occurring in government buildings. In fact, while towns had the lowest prevalence of written policies on

Figure 1. Current Written Ordinance/Policy on Smoking in County and Municipal Buildings as of January, 2006

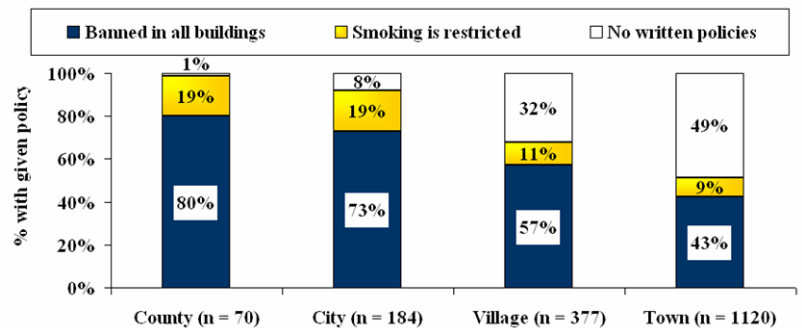
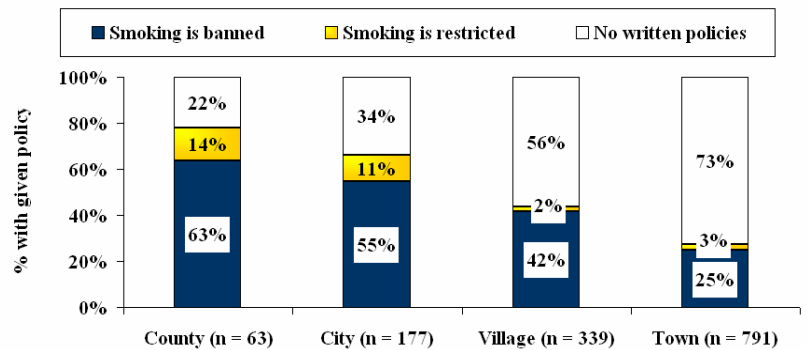


Figure 2. Current Written Ordinance/Policy on Smoking in County and Municipal Vehicles as of January, 2006



smoking, they were most likely to report that smoking never occurs in their government buildings.

The level of reported smoking in government buildings relative to the type of written smoking policy established is presented in **Figure 4**. Counties and municipalities where smoking is banned via a written policy were most likely to report that smoking never occurs (91%). However, those counties and municipalities with no written ordinances and those that did not know or state their written policies also reported high rates of smoking never occurring in government buildings (69% and 78%, respectively). In contrast, only 20% of counties and municipalities where smoking is restricted reported that smoking never occurs in government buildings

Table 1 suggests that more governments may be enacting written policies banning smoking in all buildings. One-half of all counties and municipalities reported having written policies that ban smoking in government buildings. An additional 30% have unwritten understandings that smoking is not allowed in any buildings.

Figure 3. Percentage of Counties and Municipalities Reporting that Smoking Never Occurs in Government Buildings, by Municipality Type

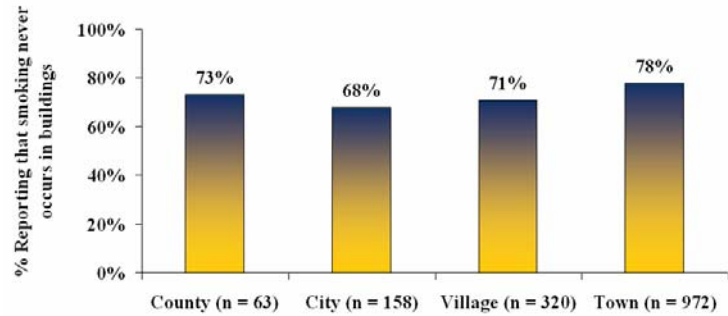


Figure 4. Percentage of Counties and Municipalities Reporting that Smoking Never Occurs in Government Buildings, by Type of Written Policy on Smoking

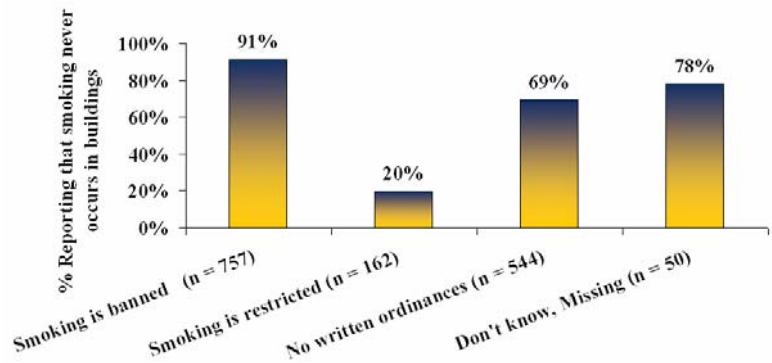


Table 1. Proportion of Wisconsin Counties and Municipalities that Banned Smoking in all Government Buildings Using Written or Unwritten Policies, 2001, 2003 and 2006

	1996*	1997*	2001*	2003*	2006		
					Written Policies	Unwritten Policies	Total Written or Unwritten Policies
County (N=72)	33%	49%	67%	67%	79%	3%	82%
City (N = 190)	9%	29%	70%	75%	72%	8%	79%
Village (N = 401)			54%	58%	56%	25%	81%
Town (N = 1,260)	NA	NA	47%	52%	42%	37%	79%
WEIGHTED TOTAL (N = 1,923)	NA	NA	52%	56%	50%	30%	80%

*Note: In 1996, 1997, 2001 and 2003, counties and municipalities were not asked if their policies were written or unwritten. Therefore the rates are not directly comparable to 2006 rates. In 1996 and 1997, towns were not surveyed, so a weighted total is unavailable; In addition, only a combined estimate is available for cities and villages for those years.

These data also suggest that different types of municipalities employ different methods by which to reduce smoking in government buildings. When both written and unwritten policies are considered collectively, counties, cities, villages and towns reported comparable levels of policies banning smoking in all government buildings. However, the various types of municipalities differed by method employed. Counties were least likely to use unwritten policies or general understandings to curb smoking in their buildings (3%), compared to more than one-third (37%) of towns.

Comments

As of January, 2006, more than 50% of all counties and municipalities had written policies banning smoking in all government buildings. An additional 30% used unwritten policies or general understandings to prevent smoking from occurring in government buildings. This indicates that the majority of counties and municipalities have eliminated smoking in government buildings, by some means – written or unwritten.

The vast majority of counties (99%) and cities (91%) have some written ordinance/policy in place that either bans or restricts smoking. Most ban it in all buildings, but a significant minority (19%) restricts smoking to certain locations. These policies do not eliminate the risk of secondhand smoke exposure for those employees and members of the public who must enter those unrestricted areas. To meet the goal of the Tobacco Control Plan in cities and counties, governments will need to strengthen existing policies, eliminating any exceptions.

Villages (68%) and towns (52%) are less likely to have any type of written ordinance/policy in place regarding smoking. However, towns are the governmental unit most likely to report that no one ever smokes in government buildings. These two findings indicate that to meet the goal of the Tobacco Control Plan in towns and villages, government officials may need to enact policies that codify the smoke-free environments already in existence. Written policies are the best way to ensure continuity of smoke-free environments through changes in personnel and administration.

Smoking in government vehicles is less likely to be banned via a written ordinance/policy, ranging from 63% of counties to 25% of towns. An additional 14% to 3% have restrictions on smoking in vehicles. This may reflect the perception that smoking in vehicles poses a smaller likelihood of secondhand smoke exposure to employees and the public in general.

Technical Notes

Due to minor modifications in the 2006 questionnaire, data from the 2006 survey are not directly comparable to data from the previous surveys. In 2006, respondents were asked, “What is the current written ordinance/policy on smoking in municipal buildings?” The responses “Smoking is banned in some buildings” and “Smoking is restricted to certain areas” have been combined for all analyses. In previous surveys, clerks were asked: “What is the current ordinance/policy on smoking in county/municipal buildings?” Specifically, the word “written” was added to avoid inconsistencies in responses within counties/municipalities over time. In addition, the state’s Tobacco Prevention and Control Program is strongly recommending that such policies/ordinances be in writing in order to avoid ambiguities, and maintain smoke-free environments over time.

For the current survey, an overall response rate of 98% (n=1,769) was achieved through a combination of mailed reminders and follow-up telephone calls. Towns had the lowest response rate (97%), while 100% of counties responded. Results displayed in Table 1 have been weighted to adjust for non-response to the survey. Therefore counties, cities, villages and towns have respective weights of 1.00, 1.02, 1.02, and 1.03.

For all analyses, other than those conducted for Table 1 and Figure 4, non-respondents and respondents answering “Don’t Know” to pertinent questions have been removed from the denominator. In analyses conducted for Table 1 and Figure 4, non-respondents and respondents answering “Don’t know” in regards to a question about their written policies on smoking are included for analysis of further questions. In Table 1, respondents answering “Don’t know” in regards to a question about whether there was an unwritten policy (i.e. a general understanding) that smoking is not allowed in municipal buildings were excluded from the denominator. In Figure 4, non-respondents and respondents answering “Don’t know” in regards to a question about whether smoking ever occurs in government buildings were excluded from the denominator. In Figure 1, counties and municipalities were excluded from the denominator if they did not own or lease any buildings; in Figure 2, they were excluded if they did not own or lease any vehicles.