



Smokers Waste an Hour Every Day on Smoking Breaks Alone - Employers Fighting Back, Says ASH

Smokers average about four 15-minute smoking breaks a day, wasting an employer more than a year of the smoker's working life, according to a new study, yet most employers don't reduce their pay or permit nonsmokers similar break time - ASH

Sept. 29, 2010 - [PRLog](#) -- Smokers average about four 15-minute smoking breaks a day, wasting an employer more than a year of the smoker's working life, according to a new study, yet most employers don't reduce their pay or permit nonsmokers similar break time for health or recreational activities.

<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/202170/Smokers-Puffing-their-lives-away>

Indeed, notes Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), a single smoking employee can cost his or her employer over \$12,000 a year in added medical care costs, additional disability pay, excess absenteeism, lost productivity, and other costs -- most of which are borne by nonsmoking employees.

[http://ash.org/\\$12000](http://ash.org/$12000)

"Because most employers charge smokers no more than nonsmokers for health insurance and other benefits, nonsmoking workers are unfairly forced to absorb the huge additional costs smoking imposes on a business - over \$12,000 a year - but more companies are beginning to fight back," says public interest law professor John Banzhaf of ASH, America's first nonsmokers' rights organization. Here's how:

- * Some employers are beginning to request smokers to clock out when they take additional breaks just to smoke.
- * A growing number of companies are charging their employees more for health insurance if they smoke.
- * About a dozen states charge their smoking employees more for health insurance.
- * At least one state penalizes Medicaid recipients if they smoke.

Some companies are going even further by keeping smokers off the payroll in the first place. Some openly refuse to hire smokers, while others simply give a strong preference in hiring to nonsmokers. Other companies effectively discourage smokers from working there, either by refusing to permit any smoking on their property, or by barring from the property any individual who has a detectable odor of tobacco smoke residue about their person.

Various measures to force smokers to bear more of the huge cost their smoking imposes on others, and/or to discourage them from smoking, are increasingly being supported by the public. This growing trend to require smokers to pay in taxes at least a portion of the huge costs they impose on the economy -- almost \$200 billion a year - is reflected in a recent national poll which finds that voters favor a \$1/pack increase in state cigarette taxes by an overwhelming 67%-31% margin - more than 2 to 1 - with 53% saying they "strongly" support such a tax increase. The increase is favored by Democrats (70%), Republicans (58% percent), and Independents (64%).

Charging smokers more for health insurance is also what the public wants, says public interest law professor John Banzhaf of ASH.

When MSNBC reported in August, 2009, on a plan by ASH to incorporate personal responsibility into the new health reform law by charging smokers more for health insurance, it noted that 57% of Americans favor higher health insurance premiums for smokers, as contrasted with only 36% favoring a similar surcharge on the obese. [www.pr-inside.com/most-want-health-insurance-smoker-surcharge-r1 ..](http://www.pr-inside.com/most-want-health-insurance-smoker-surcharge-r1..)

Indeed, ASH was successful in helping to persuade Congress in the new health reform law to permit charging smokers up to 50% more for their health insurance, but similar surcharges for other health factors such as obesity can be instituted only if they are part of a federally qualified "wellness" program, and then only up to a lower percentage.

At about the same time, the WorkTrends report noted that a majority of workers supported charging employees who smoke more for their health insurance (50% vs 47%), whereas they opposed similar charges for those who drink too much alcohol (43% vs. 54%), and strongly oppose such charges for workers who are very overweight (26% vs. 69%).
[www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/uploadedFiles/Publications/Heldrich_Cen ..](http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/uploadedFiles/Publications/Heldrich_Cen..)

Interestingly, the same report said that workers also strongly oppose the use of financial incentives to promote healthier behaviors. "The notion that participation in a wellness program should be rewarded with extra pay or extra time off, however, is troubling to workers. . . . Two thirds of workers (66%) feel that employers should not provide extra pay to participants, and 6 in 10 (59%) say the same about extra time off."

A more recent survey by CNNMoney.com showed even more support for charging smokers higher rates for health insurance. Asked "should insurers penalize people for unhealthy behavior?," 31% said "yes, it promotes good health," and an additional 22% responded "only for very unhealthy things like smoking." In short, 53% would support such a surcharge, whereas only 31% favor using incentives instead.
money.cnn.com/POLLSERVER/results/51174.html

A much higher percentage of employees would probably support charging smokers more for health insurance if they realized that each smoking employee can cost a company more than \$10,000 a year in higher health care costs, disability payments, time lost from work, etc. -- money which otherwise could be used to provide better health insurance coverage for all employees, higher salaries, or for other purposes.
[ash.org/\\$12,000](http://ash.org/$12,000).

"If any other group of workers - female, Black, Hispanic, etc. - insisted that they be given 12% more time for work breaks, or that their employer had to pay over \$12,000 a year more to employ them, their demands would be strongly opposed by all the other workers and firmly rejected by employers, yet that's what smokers are doing when they insist upon special privileges to smoke during the work day, and that companies must be forced to absorb the huge costs they impose," says Banzhaf.

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Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), America's first anti-smoking and nonsmokers' rights organization, serves as the legal action arm of the anti-smoking community. It is supported by tax-deductible contributions.

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