

Collaboration Leads to a Safer, Tobacco-Free Arkansas State Fair

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A National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program Success Story

Summary

The Arkansas State Fair is one of the largest family events in the state, attracting over 400,000 visitors every year. Unfortunately, there were no policies to protect visitors and employees from exposure to secondhand smoke, a risk factor for lung cancer and respiratory problems. In 2015, the Arkansas Cancer Coalition (ACC) worked with state fair officials to develop a policy to prohibit tobacco use during the fair in an effort to protect patrons. Fairgrounds are now tobacco- and nicotine-free environments all year.

Challenge

Arkansas has one of the highest smoking rates in the United States. Almost 25% of Arkansas adults smoke, compared to 15% of adults nationally. In addition, the state has the third highest lung cancer incidence in the nation. Arkansas is one of 24 states that does not have a comprehensive tobacco-free policy to reduce residents' exposure to secondhand smoke in businesses, workplaces, restaurants, gaming facilities, and bars. There is also no statewide protection from e-cigarette vapors.



In the past, the Arkansas State Fair prohibited tobacco use in enclosed buildings but had no written site-wide policy and did not address e-cigarettes and vapors. Families were not properly protected from secondhand smoke outdoors, which put them at risk for harmful diseases like lung cancer and respiratory problems.

Solution

ACC partnered with Arkansas State Fair officials to create a safer environment for visitors and employees, and increase the attendance of those who avoided the fair because of secondhand smoke. To set the stage for a tobacco-free fair proposal, ACC sought community support and buy-in by hosting an educational booth at the 2014 Arkansas State Fair to learn about patron attitudes toward a tobacco-free fair. Over 1,000 visitors completed the survey, and 75% were in favor of a tobacco-free fair. This positive feedback motivated state fair officials to adopt a tobacco-free policy for the next year.

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). To learn more about the National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/ncccp.



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Collaborating to Conquer Cancer

Results

In 2015, state fair officials developed a written policy to prohibit tobacco and nicotine use in all indoor offices and entertainment facilities at the Arkansas State Fair. This included a 20-foot tobacco-free zone outside of each area. At ACC's recommendation, fair management created permanent signage for all indoor facilities and increased enforcement. A joint press release between ACC and the Arkansas State Fair generated media interviews and social media conversations about the policy.

Visitor numbers increased by 7% from the previous year, beating a 2010 sales record despite claims that tobacco restrictions would hurt fair attendance. In 2016, fair officials amended their tobacco policy to also prohibit tobacco and e-cigarette use in waiting lines for carnival rides and family areas.

“This change affirms our mission of creating a family-friendly atmosphere and protecting the public and fair workers from secondhand smoke and tobacco litter. But most of all, we want to protect children and youth by reducing the chance that they will associate tobacco use with fun and entertainment.”

- Ralph Shoptaw
President and General
Manager of AR State Fair

Future Directions

ACC, State Fair officials, and other public health partners have a shared goal of maintaining a healthy environment for patrons of the state fair, so they began an evaluation of the new policy's impact in 2017. These partners continue to identify opportunities for decreasing statewide tobacco use with hopes of reducing the high smoking rates that lead to preventable chronic diseases like lung cancer.

Partnerships like this allow ACC to work with broader audiences in creating a healthier Arkansas. This initiative established a successful approach that has been replicated with other new community partners, such as a barber and beauty school, and an outdoor water park.

Your Involvement is Key

Reducing tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke is the most effective way to protect your community from lung cancer and other tobacco-related diseases. ACC can support your efforts to create smoke-free environments at theme parks, music festivals, county fairs, and businesses. Learn more about strategies Arkansans have chosen to improve cancer prevention, detection, and care efforts in the state by visiting the Arkansas Cancer Plan or by joining the ACC (www.arcancercoalition.org).

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