



For Immediate Release
June 16, 2006

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE THERE'S MEASURABLE POLLUTION

New Study Finds Smoking Establishments Have Air Pollution Levels Four Times Higher Than Federal Guidelines Permit

CHARLESTON, SC - Researchers recently fanned out to 64 Charleston County bars and restaurants to assess just how healthy they are as workplaces. Equipped with a small machine that rested atop their tables, the researchers measured the quality of the air – assessing even the presence of the smallest particles known to be released by secondhand cigarette smoke (such as those that are inhaled deeply into lungs).

Their findings: The quality of the air in local bars and restaurants that allow smoking is four times worse than the maximum toxicity levels allowed by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Specifically, bars and restaurants that allow smoking have an average level of particulate matter measuring 260; the Environmental Protection Agency allows a maximum daily exposure of 65. The research was released today by the Smokefree Lowcountry Campaign, in conjunction with MUSC researchers Dr. Cindy Carter and Dr. Matthew Carpenter, and in association with researchers from Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

“We see the results of this study as offering conclusive evidence that Charleston’s workers need – and deserve – smokefree workplaces, everywhere,” said Dr. Cindy Carter, lead researcher. “When you see workers exposed to pollution levels four times the EPA maximum allowed level, that’s a patently unhealthy environment.”

The researchers also found that many of their high scores came from establishments that appeared to be relatively safe. “Walking in, some places might not seem particularly smoky; but the measurements proved to us that chemicals are present, even though they can’t be detected by our eyes or our noses,” Dr. Matthew Carpenter added.

The study employed a Personal Aerosol Monitor manufactured by TSI SidePak; it measures the presence of particulate matter 2.5 microns in size (PM_{2.5}). Particles of this size are released from burning cigarettes. Researchers have identified 250 toxic or carcinogenic chemicals in second hand smoke; all of these are detected by the TSI SidePak.

In all 64 venues – 45 were smoking and 19 non-smoking – air quality measurements were taken continuously for a minimum of 30 minutes. Data analysis was completed independently by Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

The study was funded by organizers of Smokefree Lowcountry, a public awareness campaign designed to help residents understand the effect of second hand smoke on workers and others. Group members include representatives from South Carolina DHEC, American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, Palmetto AME Conference, Smoke Free Lowcountry Coalition, American Heart Association, SC African American Tobacco Control Network and others.

Regina Creech, a spokesperson for the local Smokefree Lowcountry Coalition, noted: “Research shows us that local voters favor a smokefree workplace ordinance. We’ve polled visitors and they told us they would return to a smokefree Charleston. And we now see that workers are exposed to exceedingly high levels of chemicals wherever smoking is allowed indoors. This is clear evidence that arguments against a smokefree workplace law are based on emotion; our empirical data shows such a law would be beneficial to Charleston.”

The Smokefree Lowcountry campaign kicked off in February with the release of a voter poll, which found that Charleston residents are more likely to visit restaurants and bars if a smoke-free law is enacted. Nearly 90% of those surveyed would go out to restaurants and bars either about as often, or more frequently, than they do now if Charleston passes a smoke free ordinance. (63% report about the same frequency; 24% expect to go out more often).

Last month, the group released findings from a survey of Charleston area visitors, which found that approximately 90% would find a smokefree ordinance to be attractive, or at the very least neutral, in their decisions to return to the area as visitors.

###

Media Contact:
Colleen Troy
843 296 2033
ctroy@touchptcom.com