

Smoking ban reduces heart attacks by 27 percent in rural Mississippi

By Lindsey V. Corey

When Matt Cox voted to ban smoking in his hometown, he didn't realize it could be "that easy to save lives."

But in the three years after Starkville, Miss., instituted a smoke-free ordinance, the local hospital saw a 27 percent reduction in heart attacks.

"I was surprised at what a dramatic and immediate impact it made," says Cox, who was a member of the board of aldermen that unanimously passed the law in 2006. "It validated our work. It's not a convenience or preference issue about where you eat; it's a true community health issue."

Robert McMillen, PhD, Mississippi State University (MSU) assistant professor of psychology, reviewed heart attack admission data from Oktibbeha County Hospital in Starkville, population 24,300.

"Inaction is costing lives and creating unnecessary sickness and suffering."

Roy Hart, Mississippi Office of Tobacco Control director

He also spearheaded the grassroots campaign to get the college town to become the first municipality in the state with a comprehensive smoke-free law.

"It didn't cost us or the community a dime," he says of the e-mail distribution list that grew from word-of-mouth, a town hall meeting and local media coverage.

At least 375 other U.S. communities have banned smoking in restaurants, bars and workplaces, according to the Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation. And 19 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., are smoke-free in public indoor spaces.

Last fall, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention commissioned a review of 11 studies on communities in Canada, Italy, Scotland and the United States. Heart attack reduction ranged from 6 to 47



Robert McMillen, PhD, spearheaded efforts to get his town to go smoke-free and followed the ban with research on its effects.

percent, but each municipality showed a decline following its comprehensive smoking ban. Two independent studies published by the American Heart Association concluded that heart attack admissions decreased, on average, by 17 percent the first year a smoke-free ordinance was in place and that the benefit increases over time.

"We thought it was important to look at rural communities because risk factors tend to be higher in rural areas, so it would be useful to see if smoke-free laws can reduce heart attacks where people may be more prone to them anyway," McMillen says. "I thought the effects might be a bit smaller here because we know tobacco use is more common in rural areas than urban. But our results are right in line with the other studies. Replication is powerful."

McMillen also just completed a similar study of Hattiesburg, Miss., where a smoking ban went in to effect Jan. 1, 2007. Two hospitals service the rural county. In the three years since the ban, those hospitals saw

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