

Highlights of the 2006 Secondhand Smoke Survey of Registered Voters in Otter Tail County, MN

June 2006

STUDY DESIGN: A telephone survey of 350 randomly selected registered voter households was conducted in Otter Tail County, Minnesota, in June of 2006. A stratified sampling design was used to ensure a representative sample of registered voters within the county with an error rate below 5% and a confidence level of 95%. The sample also was designed to allow for independent analysis by each of the five County Commissioner districts. However, in order to keep the costs of data collection manageable, sampling at the district level resulted in a confidence level of 90%. Interviews were conducted with registered voters based on data from the latest voter registration list supplied by the Minnesota Office of the Secretary of State. The response rate for this survey was 58%.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: Key objectives of the study were to a) assess registered voters' attitudes and perceptions of secondhand smoke, and b) determine their opinions of public policies related to secondhand smoke. For detailed results of the study, see <http://www.ndsu.edu/sdc/publications.htm>.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Distribution of smokers in Otter Tail County

- ▶ In 2005, one-fifth of adult Minnesota residents smoked, either regularly or occasionally, and the proportion of adult smokers has been declining since 2001 (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data available at www.cdc.gov/brfss). The smoking status among registered voters is:
 - ▶ 15% smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products on a regular basis.
 - ▶ 6% occasionally smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products.
 - ▶ 34% used to smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products, but quit.
 - ▶ 46% have never smoked or used other tobacco products.

2. General issues regarding Otter Tail County

- ▶ Overall, registered voters are pleased with their county's economic health, leadership, and future direction.
 - 72% are pleased with the county's economic health.
 - 68% are pleased with decisions of their county leaders.
 - 63% are pleased with the direction the county is going in the future.
- ▶ Results from a previous study of Otter Tail County residents show that (*Secondhand Smoke Survey for Central and Western Minnesota: February 2005 Survey Results* report available at www.ndsu.edu/sdc):
 - 64% agreed that people in their county seem resistant to change.
 - 56% believed that people in their county are somewhat informed about issues regarding secondhand smoke.

3. Smoking and secondhand smoke issues

- ▶ The vast majority of registered voters say that secondhand smoke bothers them, and that people and workers should be protected from secondhand smoke.
 - 68% say that exposure to secondhand smoke bothers them "a lot" or "a fair amount"
 - 85% agree that people should be protected from secondhand smoke.
 - 86% agree that restaurant employees should have a smoke-free workplace.
 - 75% agree that bar employees should have a smoke-free workplace.

4. Government's role in secondhand smoke policy and policy preferences

- ▶ Registered voters' responses to prioritizing various issues underscore the difficult decisions Otter Tail County Commissioners have to make.
 - **Regarding public health issues:**
 - 73% of registered voters place high priority on customers being able to breathe clean, smoke-free air in bars and restaurants.

- In contrast, 21% place high priority on people who smoke being able to smoke in bars and restaurants.
- When asked to choose between the two issues, the choice was clearcut - 71% said clean, smoke-free air for customers should take priority.
- **Regarding workplace environment issues:**
 - 72% of registered voters place high priority on protecting employees by requiring smoke-free work environments.
 - 50% place high priority on business owners being allowed to regulate whether the work environments are smoke-free.
 - When asked to choose between the two issues, the choice was still clear - 55% said protecting employees should take priority.
- ▶ Registered voters overwhelmingly support passing an ordinance prohibiting smoking in indoor workplaces, and agree that it should take effect on the same date for all establishments affected. There is some contention regarding whether the ordinance should be a complete ban or should exclude bars.
 - Nearly 87% support passing an ordinance, and 84% agree that the ordinance should take effect on the same date in order to provide a level playing field.
 - 53% support an ordinance prohibiting smoking in ALL indoor workplaces.
 - 34% support an ordinance with EXCLUSIONS:
 - Among the one-third of registered voters who favor exclusions, the majority agree smoking should be prohibited in restaurants that DO NOT serve alcohol (74%) as well as bowling alleys (66%). They are split nearly evenly regarding restaurants that DO serve alcohol.
 - Among the one-third of registered voters who favor exclusions, the majority think bars and private clubs should be excluded from an ordinance (71% and 69%, respectively).
- ▶ Yet, registered voters believe that Otter Tail County Commissioners' decisions should protect the health and safety of the general public and employees.
 - 87% believe that secondhand smoke is a health issue.
 - 85% believe air quality should be regulated in the same way as safe and sanitary food and lodging.
 - 81% say Otter Tail County Commissioners should pass laws that protect public health and safety.

5. Economic impact of a smoke-free ordinance

- ▶ A useful measure of the economic impact of a smoke-free ordinance is an assessment of the perceived change in customers' use of facilities.
 - ▶ Registered voters were asked to indicate how various locations being smoke-free would affect their use of those establishments. Contrary to negative impacts to businesses, responses show that for each type of facility, the proportion of registered voters who would choose to visit more often outweighs those who would visit less often.
 - Significant proportions of registered voters would use various facilities more often or it would not make a difference if they were smoke-free. The proportions are as follows:
 - *Restaurants that DO NOT serve alcohol* - 49% would use them more often while only 9% would use them less often; 41% said smoke-free would not make a difference
 - *Restaurants that DO serve alcohol* - 39% would use them more often while only 11% would use them less often; 50% said smoke-free would not make a difference
 - *Bars or cocktail lounges* - 26% would use them more often while only 11% would use them less often; 62% said smoke-free would not make a difference
 - *Places of indoor amusement* - 53% would use them more often while only 7% would use them less often; 39% said smoke-free would not make a difference
 - ▶ One should keep in mind that only 20 percent of the potential market is comprised of current smokers.
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