

SMOKING IN THE WORKPLACE

Emphysema & Heart Disease

According to the American Lung Association (ALA), cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States. Most people know about the harmful health effects of smoking such as an increased risk for emphysema and heart disease, but not everyone knows about the extra risk and cost resulting from smoking at the workplace.

Toxic Chemicals

Smoking in the workplace becomes extremely toxic when chemicals in cigarettes are mixed with chemicals in the workplace. The worst example is the mixture of cigarette smoke and exposure to asbestos. Asbestos workers who smoke more than a pack of cigarettes per day have up to 90 times the chance of dying from lung cancer, according to the ALA.

Many of the toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke are also commonly present in the workplace, such as tars and formaldehyde. Smoking at the workplace increases the worker's exposure to these chemicals.

Cigarettes can become contaminated by chemicals in the workplace and enter the body when smoked. For this reason, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) strongly recommends that cigarettes not be kept on a person or around chemicals and that hands be thoroughly washed before smoking. This is especially hazardous around Teflon and can lead to Polymer Fume Fever. Inhaling the heated Teflon that contaminates the cigarette can cause permanent lung damage.

Smoking = Increased Costs, Accidents

In addition to the health risks, smoking in the workplace also increases costs. Smokers have twice the accident rate of nonsmokers on the job due to loss of attention, busy hands, irritated eyes, coughing, lower alertness and reflex speed. (Source: American Lung Association) This can be a big liability to a company when determining the number of injuries and premium rates for Workers' Compensation insurance.

Laws on Smoking, Discrimination

It is important for employers to know the laws concerning smoking in the workplace. California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, and New York currently have laws in place that prohibit smoking in all workplaces. States, cities, and counties also have individual laws. Visit [www.occupationalhealth.com](#) to see current laws on smoking in the workplace.

While there are no laws protecting an employee's right to smoke at work, it is illegal to discriminate against an employee because s/he smokes. Companies may not base any work-related decisions such as hiring and firing on whether an employee smokes.

It is important for companies to create written policies on smoking. If smoking is allowed, it should be done only in designated spots separate from hazardous chemicals or the main work area.



CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS:

3550 West Robinson
Norman, OK 73072

tel: 405.292.1428
fax: 405.292.1436

toll free: 888.811.5150
toll free fax: 888.811.5161