

## **Who Cares About the Air? The Hazy Hills Case Study**

A Study in Policy Development

### **Introduction**

Approximately 440,000 people die each year as a result of smoking. There is a vast body of research that shows a direct link between smoking and/or exposure to second hand smoke and a number of diseases, including Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), periodontitis, peptic ulcers, lung cancer, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), asthma, emphysema, and heart disease. As a result, Clean Air Campaigns have been underway in many major metropolitan areas throughout the United States in recent years. However, advocacy around clean air standards has not been as prominent in rural and small town areas.

This case study explores opportunities for policy initiatives to combat high rates of tobacco use in a small town environment. Hazy Hills is a blue collar town with approximately 15,000 residents. The town would not even be in existence if not for the factories that surround it, including Popular Smokes, a cigarette and cigar products manufacturer. Through educating and informing public officials, mobilizing health professionals, engaging local businesses, building community coalitions, and empowering citizens, a grassroots organization attempts to influence legislation to reduce tobacco use and establish smoke-free public environments. This study analyzes the perceived problems, potential solutions for reducing tobacco use, and improving air quality, and the political dynamics influencing the success of the introduced measures. The Hazy Hills case demonstrates the complexity of policy change even as windows of opportunity open.

### **Case Scenario**

As the train pulls into town, you take off your glasses, wipe them, and peer out the train car window. Your view appears somewhat hazy. As the train slowly approaches your stop, the sign reads "Welcome to Hazy Hills". You wonder how your visit will go with your family and how different the town looks since you have been away for several years, ever since you took the job as senior researcher with Fine Quality Air Resorts.

Hazy Hills is a blue collar town with approximately 15,000 residents. The town wouldn't exist if not for the factories that surround it. Residential neighborhoods are dense for such a small town. There is one major high school, Hazy Hills High, with two middle and two primary schools in the community.

As you exit the train you take a deep breath, noticing your mother and older brother, a local physician, waiting nearby. As you exhale, you begin to cough, thinking "I must

have a cold coming on". You greet your family and make your way to getting settled in for a long visit.

The town is run by Mayor John Popular, owner of the second largest factory in the community, Popular Smokes, where they make and export cigarette and cigar supplies. The company saves test dollars by having their employees participate in factory product testing. In fact, employees are rewarded with products at the end of each month. Mr. Popular encourages more products to be tested by employees' family members. Popular Smokes employs about 1,000 people from Hazy Hills and surrounding communities. There is a six member Hazy Hills County Board that reports to the Mayor. There is a Board of Health and a Community Health Advisory group that does not meet as regularly, as it once had. Many of the folks that used to participate in these activities spend more time away with their families, vacationing in other fresh air environments such as Febreeze and Breeze Blow, Illinois.

Each day as you go through town, you pass the Hazy Hills High School, where you notice the students smoking outside school. You wave at one of your old school buddies, Candy Cough, now one of the teachers, who is out smoking with the students. Even the middle school kids are smoking as they walk to and from school.

You are disturbed by what you have seen these first few weeks. You wonder how you can get this town focused on the health of the children and families. You decide it is time to go to work. You begin your research, which is what really brought you back home. "Do smoke free environments lead to longer, healthier lifestyles?"

You start by asking yourself a few questions:

- 1) Who are the decision makers for this community?
- 2) Are there active school health advocates?
- 3) What ordinances that address public place smoking currently exist in Hazy Hills?
- 4) Are there any documented health statistics that represent this community?

Other community members that you have met:

- 1) Dr. Ido Savyerlung, a physician who is quite active in the community. He chairs the hospital medical staff. There have been medical reports indicating increased respiratory illnesses in the community, especially among youth.
- 2) The Hazy Hills Board of Health, chair Ms. Smelso Purdy, who is a sweet little lady who just needs more community support for Public Health.
- 3) The Public Health Administrator, Mr. W. Wrightway, who would like to implement a smoking ban in the community, starting with the schools and restaurants. He is very concerned about the number of house fires resulting from unattended cigarettes.
- 4) The Fire Chief, Bob I. Putitout, also is concerned about the health and safety of the Hazy Hills community.

On a quiet afternoon at the Hazy Hills Public Library, you bury yourself in newspaper and journal articles about the recent legislative success of the Clean Air Chicago project. It's still surprising that Hazy Hills, a mere two hours from the big city, has not identified the public health problems associated with the factory and rampant smoking.

Cigarette smoke is comprised of more than 4,000 chemicals. Of these, at least 40 are known to cause cancer. Tar, nicotine, hydrogen cyanide, benzene, acetone, formaldehyde, ammonia and carbon monoxide are just some of the ingredients in cigarettes. Secondhand smoke has also been shown to have an effect on the economy. In workplace studies, productivity rose and absenteeism declined among former smokers compared with current smokers. Additionally, secondhand smoke results in higher health insurance rates, worker compensation payments, accidents and fires, property damage, increased cleaning and maintenance costs, and potential corporate image problems.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that second hand smoke costs our economy approximately \$10 billion per year. This includes lost wages and medical expenses related to smoking.<sup>2</sup>

You know that the Tobacco Industry has tremendous political power in Illinois and at the federal level. It is one of the most powerful special interest groups, contributing massive amounts of money to politicians and political parties. However, you suspect that the facts about nicotine are persuasive enough to make the citizens of Hazy Hills see the light. Nicotine addiction is a pediatric disease. The average age to become a daily smoker is 14.5 years. Further, secondhand smoke is deadly, triggering roughly 1,000,000 episodes of childhood illness every year. Annual health care costs attributable to tobacco use are in excess of \$50 billion dollars in the United States. The tobacco industry spends more than \$17 million a day to promote their product, targeting teens, minorities and women.

You think back to your graduate school days, remembering the lectures of Professor Hollis E. Wolk on setting the policy agenda. Although it only collected dust on your shelf twenty years ago, you remember a text that was thread through all your policy classes. You head to the card catalog and begin thumbing through until you find it. Kingdon<sup>3</sup> suggests that policy development can be simplified into a set of processes including 1) setting the agenda 2) specifying alternatives from which a choice can be made 3) narrowing and selecting a solution from the alternatives, and 4) implementing the decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. Utah Department of Health

<sup>2</sup> American's for Nonsmokers' Rights. "Business Costs in Smoke Filled Environments." October, 2005. <http://www.no-smoke.org/document.php?id=209>

<sup>3</sup> Kingdon, John W. (1995). Agenda, Alternatives, and Public Policies. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. HarperCollins College Publishers.

With Kingdon on the mind, you spend the next few weeks educating and organizing the constituents who agree to attend the next County Board Meeting. This volunteer group of doctors, nurses, dentists, substance-abuse counselors, and school nurses has witnessed first hand the devastation of tobacco-related diseases and death. The Hazy Hills Clean Air Coalition (HHCAC) was born in the Popular Conference Room of the city library.

### **Researching Hazy Hills and Setting the Agenda**

The first HHCAC sub-committee decides to conduct focus groups of local teens to ask the following questions: Where do children obtain their tobacco products? If purchased, were they asked for proof of age? What type? Do tobacco merchants post signs indicating it is against the law for merchants to sell tobacco to minors? Where are cigarette vending machines located? Where are tobacco billboards located? Does the community allow tobacco sponsors for special events?

The second sub-committee decides to research the community and its demographic composition to determine if there are cultural norms that promote tobacco use. The 2000 census indicates that Hazy Hills is primarily inhabited by third generation Eastern European immigrants and Hispanic migrant workers. There are also two neighborhoods in which African Americans make up the majority of the residents and most of these families are supported by at least one adult employed by Popular Smokes.

When the committees report back, you realize this will be an uphill battle. Most of the teens in the focus groups had already begun smoking. Many of them were wearing tobacco related promotional items, such as hats and t-shirts. Several of them stated that their parents were employed by local factories. "My folks already know I smoke. We bum smokes from each other," one teen admitted.

One of the group members found a body of literature<sup>4</sup> that illustrated demographic trends toward smoking: While African American youth smoke at lower rates than other youth, the adults' smoking prevalence is the same or higher than other populations. African Americans generally smoke menthol cigarettes. The tobacco industry targets its advertising and promotion to minorities and especially African Americans. The industry often sponsors African American events in order to gain greater acceptance.

Hispanic women smoke less than Hispanic men. However, Hispanic women who are more acculturated smoke more than women who are not. Hispanics' number one choice of cigarettes is Marlboro. The tobacco industry also target markets Hispanics. This can be seen in Hispanic neighborhoods where tobacco billboards include advertising messages in Spanish.

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<sup>4</sup> Bracht, N., and Kingsbury, L. (1990) "Community Organization Principles" in Health Promotion at the Community Level.

People from Poland, the Ukraine, and the former Soviet Union smoke at very high rates, as smoking is widely accepted among this population. Those with the lowest levels of education and income smoke at a higher rate than those with higher levels of education and income. Many low income groups are unaware of the serious consequences of tobacco use. Indeed, this was going to be harder than you thought.

However, in a blue collar town like a Hazy Hills, the sheer impact of expense should be enough to dissuade some potential smokers. A pack of cigarettes costs approximately \$5.95 per pack. The average person smokes 1 ½ packs per day, costing \$8.95 per day. This totals \$267.60 per month, \$3211.20 per year. At this price, persons who smoke over a 25-year period will spend \$80, 280. Although incrementalism is generally the best means of enacting policy change, the coalition members believe the current situation is such a crisis that only broad policy change is acceptable. HHCAC proposes an ordinance to:

- Restrict smoking in public buildings, restaurants and workplaces in Illinois
- Ban smoking on school property
- Require warning signs regarding the dangers of smoking during pregnancy
- Increase the cigarette excise tax from 30 to 44 cents per package
- Ban unsupervised cigarette vending machines where children are present
- Determine how frequently tobacco products are Illegally sold to minors

### **Making the Pitch**

The county board meeting was crowded with both supporters and opponents of the smoking ban. Supporters could document public health studies that second hand smoke causes lung and heart disease in nonsmokers. After all Chicago's biggest proponent of the ban in that City was a woman who claimed to have gotten cancer from second hand smoke. Just this past week the local newspaper had an ad for non smokers who had become ill on second hand smoke to join a study being done at the hospital.

Ban supporters insisted restaurants would see an increase in business because nonsmokers would visit these establishments now that the air was clean. Workers who currently work in a smoky atmosphere would be healthier. Some business people recognized that nonsmokers use fewer sick days, are often more productive than smokers, and have lower health insurance costs. Smoke-free workplaces require less maintenance. Despite the non smoking campaigns at the local elementary and high schools, children were still taking up smoking. town needed to show the young people you could go out and have fun without smoking.

Opponents could site studies that said there was no correlation between second hand smoke and illness. Business owners argued they had the right to choose the environment of their establishment and that they would lose customers to businesses outside the city limits that weren't covered by the ban. This could cause restaurants to close, workers to lose their jobs, and the city to lose revenue. The sidewalks would be crowded with people who could no longer smoke inside. The city streets would be littered with cigarette butts.

The board was divided. They all agreed smoking and secondhand smoke is a public health concern. But should they put additional regulations on the manner in which a businessman runs his business. If people don't like smoking maybe they should choose to go elsewhere. That would leave the smoking/nonsmoking issue with each individual and free enterprise would dictate who stayed in business and who didn't. Additionally, how were they going to enforce a smoking ban with a volunteer fire department and one full time policeman. Also the Popular Smokes factory provided the only corporate tax base in the town. They certainly didn't support a smoking ban and if they moved out of town jobs would be lost and there would be no revenue for schools or roads.

Dr. Savyerlung and Chief Putitout represented the HHCAC platform, conveying all the information that had been gathered by the volunteer coalition. "Hazy Hills has always been a stable, working class town where family values are evident. However, over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the rate of smoking among our teen population. Statistics show that 33% of the teen smokers will become regular smokers, maintaining the habit into adulthood. Additionally, 90% of all smokers began smoking before they were 21 years old.<sup>5</sup> These statistics suggest that now is the time to act. By focusing on teen prevention and legislation, we have the opportunity to turn our town back into the model town it once was.

Passing legislation will be a major step towards improving the quality, and longevity, of life in our town. Secondhand smoke affects everyone in the vicinity. Nationwide, approximately 53,000 non-smokers die from secondhand smoke each year.<sup>6</sup> In addition, secondhand smoke causes 30 times as many lung cancer deaths as all regulated pollutants combined, up to 300,000 lung infections in children and infants, wheezing, coughing, colds, earaches, and asthma attacks. In a crowded restaurant, it may produce six times the level of air contamination as a busy highway.<sup>7</sup> In fact, one study concluded that nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke were 25% more likely to have coronary disease than those not exposed.<sup>8</sup> We realize that many of the business owners may be reluctant to switch to a smoke free environment, fearing lost customers and, therefore, lost revenue. Studies show that restaurants and bars do not lose business under a smoking ban. In fact, there is evidence that shows an increase in business. A national Zagat Survey polled over 110,000 restaurant patrons. They found that 80% of those

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<sup>5</sup> Op. cit. American Lung Association.

<sup>6</sup> Utah Department of Health. "Health and Economic Impact of Second Hand Smoke." April 15, 2005. [http://www.tobaccofreeutah.org/uicaa-busguide-ets\\_impact.html](http://www.tobaccofreeutah.org/uicaa-busguide-ets_impact.html)

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. Martin.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. American Lung Association

polled felt the restaurants should be smoke free. 32% of the respondents would eat out at restaurants more often if they were smoke free yet only 3% stated that they would eat out less.

Members of HHCAC are particularly troubled by the rates of teen smoking and the messages being sent to young adults about tobacco use. Teens are influenced by the world around them. When they see adults smoking, it sends the message that it is acceptable behavior. By going smoke free, our town will be sending the message to teens that it is not acceptable behavior. We have an obligation to the young people in our town to provide them with appropriate and comprehensive education regarding tobacco and cigarette smoke. As role models, it is up to us to take this important step. Research has shown that the current smoking programs offered basically refer to abstaining from smoking, but there are not documented cessation programs for youth who smoke to stop. Cessations classes are usually taught and geared toward adult smokers at times in the evenings not really conducive to a youthful crowd, especially if they wanted to attend anonymously. Youth classes could be offered in such settings as schools, the park district, bowling alleys, skating rinks, arcades, and churches.” Ms. Purdy smiled as the testimony concluded.

Mayor Popular addressed the Board, “Popular Smokes is the heart of this community. We employ your fathers and friends. We’ll employ the next generation and put dinner on the table. Now- we all know that big city tree huggers are in favor of big government. But government isn’t going to take care of your families. We are. That’s why the City of Hazy Hills will initiate a new program to restrict youth access to tobacco. Every store in Hazy Hills will post signs that state “It’s the Law”. because it is the law to ask for ID from anyone who looks too young to buy a pack of smokes. We care about our minors.” As you walk out of city hall, you see a handsome young athlete on the corner, leaning in to light the cigarette of a pretty girl with a pony-tail. And the sidewalks are littered with cigarette butts.

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## Conclusion

The Hazy Hills case study demonstrates how policy initiatives aren't always successful, even when the proposed solutions would benefit the health of a community. Grass roots organizations need to assess the urgency of the problem and whether or not a community is ready for change. The resistance in Hazy Hills mirrors a trend in the Midwest and the South, where smoking rates are among the nation's highest and bans have taken hold in big cities and college towns but not in rural and small communities<sup>9</sup>. "The support is just not there in those places, and it's hard to get it going," said Scott Hays, a research scientist at the University of Illinois who has studied smoking bans nationwide.

Rural America fiercely resists government interference. In communities where local legislators have known business owners for most of their lives there is a fear they will hurt the incomes of friends. Alas, for now, big budget anti-smoking campaigns are focusing on larger urban areas, where the impact is greatest, leaving rural areas to deal with higher rates of mortality and morbidity related to tobacco consumption.

Golden Girls:

Andrea Danner, Mentor

Andrea Parker

Bronwyn Jones

Colleen Rosa

Sheila Stokes

Tanya Larson-Topp

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<sup>9</sup> Torriero, E.A. *Baltimore Sun*. February 12, 2006