



City of Savannah Demonstrating Long-term Commitment

Tobacco-related illness is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, accounting for approximately 20 percent of all deaths annually. In addition, smoking-related medical expenses cost employers an extra \$2,132 per smoking employee per year.¹ In response to growing evidence that tobacco cessation programs improve employee health and yield cost savings to employers, many companies have begun implementing workplace smoking cessation programs.

The National Business Coalition on Health (NBCH) has developed a series of case studies profiling employers that have successfully implemented such programs in an effort to share best practices and lessons learned.

Background

Savannah, Ga., known as America's first "planned" city, provides services for a diverse local economy comprising manufacturing, distribution, tourism, military, health care, port operations, and retail sectors.

Population: 131,510 (2000 U.S. Census)²

Employees: 2700

Promoting Wellness

"We have long realized the value that tobacco-free employees and workplaces bring to our city. Teamwork and communication are essential to continuing success with our wellness initiatives." Sandy Jones, Administrator, Human Resources

For the last 20 years, the city of Savannah has had a strong wellness program in place that focuses on healthy lifestyles and specific areas of high risk for employees, including obesity, heart disease and tobacco use. Efforts to strengthen the city's wellness programs have included:

- Partnering with a local hospital system to help develop, implement and evaluate programs for health improvement.
- Providing health risk assessments to employees (with a 63 percent participation rate) and referring employees to tobacco cessation support and services when appropriately identified.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Annual smoking-attributable mortality, years of potential life lost, and economic costs – United States, 1995-1999. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2002; 51(14); 300-03. Adjusted to 2008 dollars.

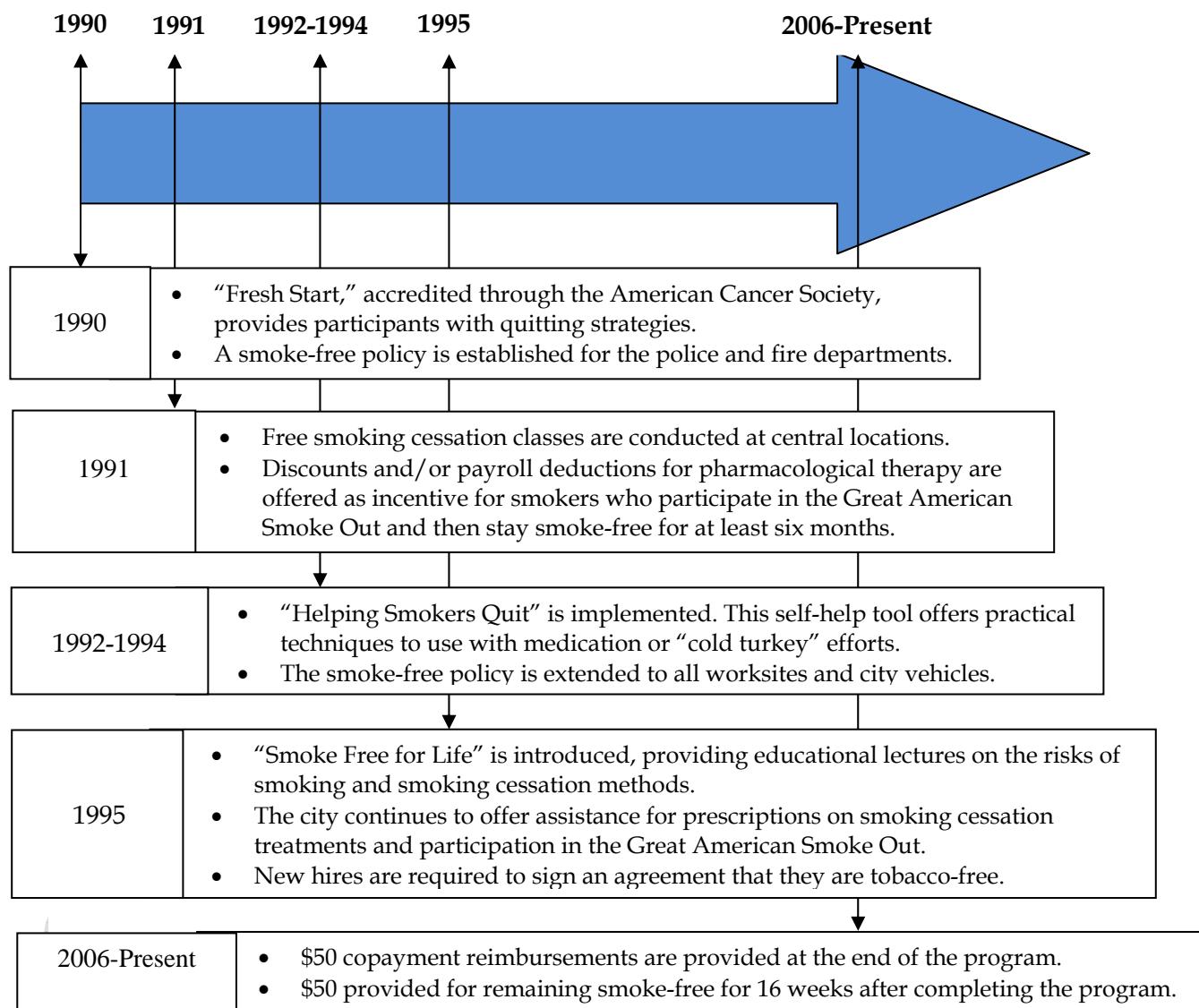
² <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13/1369000.html>. Accessed June 18, 2008

Employer Programs to Support Employees with Tobacco Cessation

- Coordinating with volunteer organizations, such as the American Cancer Society, as well as its own public health department.
- Providing access to the City of Savannah employee health and wellness coordinator.

Implementing a Smoking Cessation Program

The city of Savannah has been working to reduce smoking prevalence since 1990:



Today, the city's Smoke Stopper Program includes three phases:

Phase I – Smoke Stoppers Countdown: participants continue to smoke but keep track of each cigarette, their moods when smoking, and activities that may serve as triggers such as drinking coffee.

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Phase II—*Learning to Stop*: participants set a quit date and focus on strategies to manage stress, change routines that trigger smoking, and develop healthy habits.

Phase III—*Staying Smoke-Free*: participants focus on how to remain smoke-free for the rest of their lives.

Savannah uses the national program, Great American Smoke Out, as a springboard for encouraging employees to think about quitting and set a target quit date. Individualized counseling is another critical component of the city's strategy, based on evidence that it is more effective than group sessions.

In addition, the smoke-free policy and support programs are part of the new hire orientation program to ensure employees are aware of the city's policies from the beginning. Employees receive a pocket-size, bright yellow index card that describes the program and highlights the impact of smoking. The city also provides easy access to educational brochures from the American Cancer Society, its local hospital partner and its local coalition against tobacco.

Outcomes

Since 2006, the city of Savannah has had a 67 percent completion rate for all employees who have participated in the Smoke Stopper Program. On average, two to five employees join the program every month. The city has been very successful in the expansion of its smoking and tobacco policy among various demographic groups of city employees.

"It's exciting to see how employees buy into the concept of health and wellness and improve their lives with the programs we offer." Carmelia Lowman, Employee Health & Wellness Coordinator

Lessons Learned

With its extensive policy and support for employees, the city of Savannah cites the importance of the following in achieving its success:

- Creating new and innovative ways to attract participants.
- Having personal contact with each employee and encouraging active participation.
- Participating in an established smoking cessation effort, such as the Great American Smoke Out.
- Providing incentives to employee participants at program completion and 16 weeks after completing the program.
- Developing and implementing a powerful communications program using available information and brochures from credible sources.

Employer Programs to Support Employees with Tobacco Cessation

- Linking the program within existing programs—for example, using a health risk assessment as an entrée point.

In addition, Savannah is now considering adding a premium differential for those employees who smoke or use tobacco products as a link to health premiums.

CDC Guidelines

This case study illustrates one example along the broad spectrum of steps employers have taken to improve the health and quality of life of their employees while protecting their company's own financial health. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recommends the following actions for a comprehensive smoking-cessation benefit:

- Cover at least four counseling sessions of at least 30 minutes each, including telephone and individual counseling sessions
- Cover all FDA-approved nicotine replacement products and tobacco cessation medications³
- Provide counseling and medication coverage for at least two smoking cessation attempts per year
- Eliminate or minimize co-pays or deductibles for counseling and medications⁴

This case study was developed by NBCH as part of an educational initiative supported by Pfizer Inc. More about this project is available at www.nbch.org.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/stateandcommunity/best_practices/00_pdfs/2007/best_practices_2007.pdf. Accessed January 11, 2008.

⁴ http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/cessation/00_pdfs/ReimbursementBrochureFull.pdf