

Governments

Why

Governments, federal, state, and local, have a responsibility to protect the health and well-being of their constituents. That's why governments should legislate smokefree environments for work sites, public places, and other establishments and facilities within their jurisdiction.

Usually, governments set higher standards for their own sites than they impose upon nongovernmental work sites and public places. Thus, while not always in the forefront, federal, state, and local governments are increasingly proving to be among the leaders in establishing smokefree policies in their own organizations. Governments need to make their own facilities smokefree before they enact legislation or regulations requiring other facilities to be smokefree.

Setting policies to protect citizens and employees in government buildings and mandating similar safeguards in nongovernment settings are also effective ways for governments to reinforce the nonsmoking messages they deliver through their education and health departments.

Finally, governments, like other employers and proprietors of public places, are subject to lawsuits and other actions if they do not protect their employees and customers.

How

Governments have many ways to set smokefree standards, including legislation, regulation, and policy decisions at the federal, state, or local levels. They also have a variety of enforcement mechanisms available. Employees can be disciplined, even dismissed. Funding can be withdrawn from dependent government organizations. Contractors may be denied access to bid for government contracts. Citizens may be fined or receive stronger penalties.

Some employers or proprietors of public places provide separately enclosed, separately ventilated areas for smoking. If government facilities were to do this, the costs would fall upon taxpayers, the majority of whom are nonsmokers. In addition, to provide facilities that encourage smoking is inconsistent with other government efforts to discourage smoking.