

## THE RIGHT TO WORK WITHOUT SMOKE

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[Assignment: Argue for a position on a current controversial topic, using authoritative outside sources to support your view. The essay should contain elements of logical and emotional appeal.]

A woman sitting at her desk in a large room with many other employees can be greatly affected by second-hand smoke, and she has no control over it. A man plans to take his afternoon break in the employee lounge, but the room is too filled with cigarette smoke and he is forced to leave. Non-smokers have the right to work in a healthy, smoke-free environment.

Smokers say they have the right to smoke because it is their life, but often their activities affect the people around them. A 1993 Environmental Protection Agency report reclassified second-hand smoke as "a Group A carcinogen, likening it to benzene, asbestos and radon" (Prata 29). There were 3,000 annual cases of lung cancer in non-smokers, which were linked to environmental tobacco smoke (Evans 7). If you spend forty hours a week with a smoker, you may soon be included in that 3,000.

Across the United States many corporations are moving toward making their workplaces smoke-free. For numerous reasons, this is the only logical way for them to go, especially economically. It is estimated that employees who smoke can cost their employers more than \$4,000 a year. This extra cost is caused by absenteeism, lost productivity, medical care benefits, and increased health care costs (Lissy 17). With these figures, large companies have no other choice but to make their workplaces smoke-free. Large corporations have many employees to deal with, and they have to make the working conditions the best for the majority of workers. They also need to do what benefits the corporation.

Instead of spending extra money for health care, the money should be used to help employees quit smoking. Many corporations are helping the employees who smoke by administering non-smoking programs. One Indiana company is even paying for nicotine patches to help employees kick the habit (Prata 19). Spending the money in this way can benefit the company and the employees. Studies have shown that former smokers can better control personal circumstances and practice more health-promoting and disease-preventing behaviors (Hawk 13). These actions would be a great benefit to companies when it comes to the cost of health care plans. By making all workplaces smoke-free workers are not only helping the companies and non-smokers, but they are also making it an incentive for smoking employees to kick the habit.

Companies can also be hurt financially by lawsuits filed against them by non-smokers. Companies can get sued for employee's entitlement to unemployment compensation benefits because non-smokers cannot tolerate the smoky conditions for health reasons (Evans 9). Fighting legal cases can be costly to the companies. Having possible court costs on

top of extra costs for health care for smokers can also become an economic burden. Workers rights are important; however, the companies have to worry about their financial status as well.

Some smokers are pleased that they are "being forced" to quit smoking, while others are still fighting for their rights. Some companies will not hire smokers. Some that do, such as Texas Instruments Inc., make their employees quit smoking at work, and may charge their smoking employees \$10 a month more for insurance if they continue to smoke while not at work. This fee is raised again if the employee's dependents smoke as well. Smokers who feel they are being discriminated against are justified in a few ways. The American Civil Liberties Union states that the rights of a person are being violated if they are discriminated against because they use tobacco products outside the workplace (Lissy 17). However, when at-home activities affect performance and health care costs at work, the companies have certain rights as well. Those rights include raising insurance prices for employees who smoke. If a smoker is going to cost the company more, employers are not unreasonable in having those employees help reduce extra costs by raising the cost of their health plans. In addition, companies are taking necessary precautions to not violate the employees' rights. They are taking into consideration the needs of both smoking and non-smoking employees by working with wellness coordinators and other authorities to ensure that the smoker's rights are not being violated (Prata 32). Some companies have made designated smoking areas available and have allowed smoking in enclosed offices. But not everyone has an enclosed office. Those without enclosed offices are forced to smoke in the smoking room. However, even some smokers have complained that the smoking rooms are too smoky (Dubner 26).

It has been found often when smokers feel their rights are being violated, they are actually violating the rights of non-smokers. In one case taken to court by a non-smoker, a federal court ruled that according to the Rehabilitation Act, a non-smoking employee's hypersensitivity to tobacco qualified as a handicap (Evans 8). With decisions like these, smokers are going to have a hard time defending their right to smoke when it affects others in such serious ways. Three thousand non-smokers with lung cancer resulting from environmental tobacco cannot be ignored.

Tobacco companies are even getting involved by trying to "point the gun" at employers because they are violating smoking employees' rights (Lissy 18). This resulted because tobacco companies were worried about decreasing sales, which could ultimately lead to a decrease in jobs. This is a strong argument made by tobacco companies; however, a majority of smokers are realizing the harsh effects of tobacco and are being harder on themselves than the non-smokers are. One employee said, "Why don't you make the whole place smoke-free so I can quit?" (Prata 35). With employees like this, the tobacco companies are not receiving the support from smokers that they want, and they are having a harder time being effective with their arguments.

Society must argue against innocent people being exposed to such deadly conditions. Major steps have been taken by many companies to rid the workplace of harmful cigarette smoke, but we must take action to keep this trend going. Smoking is no longer the "thing to do," and the negative

affects are too costly. Non-smokers need to keep voicing their opinions on how they feel about their lives being endangered by fellow workers. As smokers find out what their rights are, non-smokers also need to stay aware of theirs. Non-smokers need to use their beliefs to their benefit by becoming involved in educating smokers on dangers of the habit, and of the benefits of a smoke-free work place. A good start has been made toward a smoke-free society. If all non-smokers keep insisting that a change be made and start becoming involved in the steps to getting smokers to quit, then people will listen. Society should not be plagued with diseases such as lung cancer because of someone else's bad habit. Non-smokers have rights too and should take advantage of them.

## Works Cited

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