

CDC'S DIVISION OF COMMUNITY HEALTH SUCCESS STORIES

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Austin: Tobacco-Free On The Go and At Work

SUMMARY

Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Capital Metro) is Austin's regional transit provider. As of January 1, 2013, all of its worksites, bus stops, rail platforms, transfer centers, and park & rides have become tobacco-free, affecting over 280,000 riders and 1,100 employees. Capital Metro took a holistic approach to address tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke by implementing a Tobacco-Free Workplace Wellness Initiative that promoted tobacco-free properties and tobacco cessation support to its workforce and the general community.



YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

It is clear that with patience, robust education and awareness efforts, and a clear implementation plan, any organization can go tobacco-free. Capital Metro was successful in its efforts to be a 100% tobacco-free organization and encourages other organizations to take a stand and become tobacco-free as well.

CHALLENGE

Through a workforce and rider survey, Capital Metro learned that 79% of its workforce was in favor of the Tobacco-Free Workplace Wellness Initiative and 58% of its riders were bothered by the smoke at bus stops. These results posed the challenge on how to best create a plan that would make Capital Metro a 100% tobacco-free organization over the coming months. The greatest internal challenge was organizational buy-in, from the development of agency policies to full employee endorsement. Some concerns included the safety of buses left unattended during breaks, litter to neighboring properties, enforcement and a perception of a disproportionate burden on those with higher smoking rates (within workforce and riders). In addition, many of the bus stops were technically on city-owned property which did not give Capital Metro the full authority to enforce a policy change.

"We believe that addressing an issue such as this will attract more riders in a cleaner, healthier, safer system."

- Mike Nyren, Risk Manager at
Capital Metro

SOLUTION

Capital Metro surveyed employees and riders to gauge support for tobacco-free worksites and transit systems, respectively. Since the survey data was so supportive, Capital Metro created and executed a strategic implementation plan that staggered dates for different types of facilities, including all worksites and transit facilities, to become tobacco-free. This plan entailed issue research, employee and community outreach, cessation support, and a variety of education activities--including newsletters, bus wraps signage, videos, and radio ads.

RESULTS

In June 2010, worksites became tobacco-free, with some designated tobacco use areas along the outskirts of the property. In the spirit of change, an area close to the building where people used to congregate to smoke was renovated and the building was used to feature a mural by a local artist. In September 2010, rail platforms became tobacco-free, followed by park & rides, and transfer centers in January 2011. In March 2012, Capital Metro's 2,700 bus stops became tobacco-free. As of January 1, 2013, 100% of worksites became tobacco-free and all designated smoking areas were eliminated.

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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Capital Metro is continuing to raise awareness among riders and the general community about the benefits of and need for tobacco-free worksites and facilities. The organization's robust wellness program and cessation benefits continue to help employees get the assistance they need to quit tobacco, should they choose to do so. Capital Metro is optimistic that these changes bring Austin one step closer to a community in which the social norm is to not accept tobacco. Moving forward, Capital Metro is also encouraging the City Council to create an enforceable ordinance that makes all bus stops on city property tobacco-free.