

Clearing the Air: Views on Smokefree Outdoor Dining from Both Sides of the Table

Savannah Yurcek^{1,2}, John Dale Noriega^{1,2}, Gunnar Wooldridge^{1,4}, Georg Matt^{1,3}, Nicolas Lopez-Galvez^{1,3}, Lydia Greiner^{1,3}

¹Policy Research Center for Tobacco and the Environment, ²SAY San Diego, ³San Diego State University, ⁴San Diego State University Research Foundation

Our Goal

Assess the perspectives and preferences of San Diego residents and restaurant industry professionals regarding smokefree outdoor dining in the City of San Diego.

Background

- Tobacco smoke residue, or “thirdhand smoke,” is the toxic chemical residue left behind long after smoking stops.
- Over 25 California Proposition 65 chemicals, known to cause cancer or reproductive harm, have been identified in thirdhand smoke.^{1,2}
- Patrons of outdoor restaurant patios can pick up and absorb the residue on their hands by touching tables and surfaces.
- San Diego is the largest city in San Diego County without a comprehensive smokefree outdoor dining policy.

Methods

Online, Quantitative Survey

Conduct a survey of San Diego (n=275) and California (n=1,793) residents to understand:

- Dining preferences and tobacco use
- Attitudes toward smokefree outdoor dining policies in the City of San Diego.
- Knowledge and attitudes (KA) about thirdhand smoke

In-Person, Semi-Structured Interview & Questionnaire

Conduct questionnaire and interview restaurant owners, managers, and staff (n=9) about:

- Perceived benefits and barriers to implementing smokefree patios
- Perspective on a comprehensive smokefree outdoor dining policy in the City of San Diego
- Knowledge and attitudes (KA) about thirdhand smoke

Most San Diego residents and restaurant professionals surveyed prefer smokefree outdoor dining.



73%

of San Diego County residents would not eat a meal in an outdoor dining area if people in that area were smoking, consistent with statewide polling.

78%

of San Diego County residents would support a law that banned smoking in all outdoor dining areas in the City of San Diego, including a majority of people who smoke or vape.



City of San Diego

100%

of San Diego restaurant professionals surveyed feel a smokefree policy would not have a negative impact on restaurants, in general.



88%

of San Diego restaurant professionals surveyed personally prefer eating in smokefree outdoor dining patios.



Without city intervention, restaurants do not feel empowered to implement voluntary smokefree policies.

Interview Themes

Perceived Policy Benefits

Better Customer Satisfaction

- “...Better guest enjoyment I’d say.”
- “I love not smelling it, makes our food taste better...”

Health and Safety

- “...Anytime there’s not smoking, it’s going to be a better, healthier environment.”
- “...If you work five days a week and have asthma, you probably would notice a difference if there wasn’t smoke nearby all the time.”

Employee Protection

“...If it’s not legal [to smoke on the patio], hopefully it’ll stop [employee smoking] you know? It’s a big thing...you don’t get breaks unless you’re a smoker or vaper.”

Cleanliness

“It’d definitely be cleaner. I feel like people leave their cigarettes everywhere, they leave the open carts everywhere.”

Alignment with Local Culture

- “...Most people assume it’s banned on patios all over San Diego.”
- “People are surprised...[they] just assume the restaurants in California are no smoking inside or outside.”

Perceived Policy Barriers

Short-Term Economic Impact

- “Initially? Slightly negative [impact]. Long-term? Not overall, just because at a certain point it eventually balances back out.”
- “Short term, I think we would definitely lose people because all the people [who smoke], but long term we might be able to gain more...”

Responsibility for Smokefree Policy

- “I just need a reason to do it that’s not on me.”
- “There’s just no way, honestly, that we could unless...an actual California State law that bans smoking anywhere on the property.”
- “...The regulars would understand it. They wouldn’t understand it if we banned it without it being law.”

Character of Location

“...Drinking and smoking go really hand-in-hand.”

Personal Choice

“I would say I would want people to be able to have the choice.”

Vaping Challenges

- “...It’s a little bit more...unclear how to enforce like, ‘You can’t vape’ on a patio...”
- “The only thing is vaping still...because they’re real quick...it’s easier to hide it.”

Results

Residents Survey

- **73% of both San Diegans and Californians** agree that they would not eat a meal in an outdoor dining area if people were smoking.
- **78% of San Diegans** would support a law banning smoking in all outdoor dining areas in the City of San Diego, including **53% of people who use smoke or vape.**

Restaurant Professionals Questionnaire

- **100% of participants** feel that a smokefree policy would not have a negative impact on restaurants, in general.
- **88% of participants** personally prefer eating in smokefree outdoor dining.
- **75% of participants** agree tobacco smoke residue can accumulate in outdoor spaces.
- **75% of participants** agree tobacco smoke residue contains dangerous chemicals.

Conclusion

- A comprehensive smokefree outdoor dining policy has broad support from San Diegans and Californians generally. Residents and professionals alike prefer dining in smokefree patios.
- San Diego’s restaurant industry professionals have indicated they are unlikely to implement smokefree patios on their own, due to a variety of perceived barriers and underestimation of employee health risks due to second- and thirdhand smoke exposure.
- Restaurant industry workers are an underserved occupational demographic that could benefit from targeted resources, education, and messaging.
- San Diego City Council could draft policy that shares enforcement responsibilities and eases economic burden on restaurants, while protecting workers and visitors.



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