

## Over 660,000 Wis. employees exposed to secondhand smoke at workplaces

By: Megan Orear / The Daily Cardinal - March 10, 2009

*According to a new study from the UW Carbone Cancer Center, the number of Wisconsin workers who are exposed to smoking at workplaces has decreased, but is still at a dangerous level. Workers with less education are more likely to be exposed.*

---

The UW Carbone Cancer Center released a study Monday revealing over 660,000 Wisconsin employees are exposed to harmful secondhand smoke while at work.

Dr. Patrick Remington of the cancer center said the most disappointing finding of the study was the disparity in smoking exposure among people of different races and education levels.

High school graduates are twice as likely as college graduates, men are 50 percent more likely than women and black and Hispanic workers are twice as likely as white workers to be exposed to secondhand smoke at work, according to the study.

Remington said eliminating smoking in places like college campuses and airplanes has led to social and economic disparities in workplace smoking levels.

"One could say that it's a good thing that we've made progress and almost eliminated exposure to smoking among those with the highest education, but others would say that it's an injustice not to provide a safe workplace for all," he said.

The study shows the percentage of workers exposed to smoking decreased from 33 percent in 2000 to 22 percent in 2007.

"I think this is as low as we'll go in the places that smoking is allowed without some policy to level the playing field," Remington said.

Gov. Jim Doyle included a statewide smoking ban in his 2009-'11 budget proposal. Remington said he believes the state will adopt a smoking ban eventually, but he is not sure when.

Pete Madland, executive director of the Tavern League of Wisconsin, said the choice to allow smoking should be left to the discretion of individual business owners, adding that workers can opt not to work at a business that allows smoking.

The smoking ban, according to Madland, should not be included in the budget because it is a policy issue that lawmakers should debate separately.

---