



MINNESOTA
PUBLIC RADIO®

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 2009
 54° in TWIN CITIES ([MORE CITIES](#))

NEWS &
FEATURES

EVENTS

MEMBERSHIP

ABOUT US

THE CURRENT
LISTEN
PLAYLIST

CLASSICAL
LISTEN
PLAYLIST

NEWS
LISTEN
SCHEDULE

RADIO HEARTLAND : WONDERGROUND RADIO

RADIO

Programs

Go

U of M study finds smoking bans cost few jobs

by [Lorna Benson](#), Minnesota Public Radio
 May 20, 2009

EMBED | HELP

The hospitality industry has long argued that smoking bans cause great financial difficulty for bars and restaurants because of the link between smoking and drinking. But a new study by the University of Minnesota shows that smoking bans in eight Minnesota cities did not have any significant impact on employment in those businesses.

St. Paul, Minn. — The U of M partnered with Ohio State University to analyze the economic effects of smoking bans in Minnesota cities from 2003 to 2006, the period before lawmakers passed a statewide ban.

At the time, a patchwork of municipal laws existed. Some prohibited smoking within areas of bars and restaurants. Others banned smoking completely.

Researchers sifted through state employment data to track workforce changes in bars and restaurants during that time period, co-author Jean Forster said.

"The advantage of that measure is that it's an objective measure. We didn't have to ask the business for the measure. It's something that is reported monthly to the Department of Employment and Economic Development," Forster said.

Forster and her colleagues found little change in total employment in bars and restaurants over the nearly four years they studied.

If the smoking ban had caused a big economic burden to the business, you would expect to see the industry shedding a lot of jobs, she said.

That doesn't mean jobs weren't lost because of the smoking ban. The U of M analysis didn't track employment movement within the industry.

Forster says it's possible that some bars and restaurants did close due to lost business. But others may have opened in their place and absorbed many of the laid-off employees. The point is that overall, the industry didn't shrink as a result of smoking bans, Forster said.

Frank Ball, executive director of the Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association, doesn't dispute the U of M's findings. But he contends the smoking ban did cause a lot of economic pain within his industry.

His organization has been trying to gauge the impact of smoking bans for several years. The association doesn't have solid data yet.

Shortly after the first smoking bans went into effect, about one-third of the charitable pull tab operators who work in bars went out of business, Ball said. He thinks that could reflect what happened to bars, too.

"We're guessing about 25 percent of our bars were lost as a result of smoking bans. Now, that's not to say that they haven't reopened by somebody else ... And maybe they've prospered. We don't know," Ball said.

Ball says he hasn't detected a noticeable difference in the number of license renewals from his membership. He says that indicates to him that the industry has found a way to survive.

In fact, despite all of the resistance to smoking bans over the years, many newer bar and restaurant owners tell him that they actually like the smoking ban, Ball said.

But he says there are many others who don't like it, and he wonders what good it does at this point to challenge their economic arguments.

"It's kind of like -- that was a lot of money to go into that study. For what? I mean what did that do? They're certainly not going to bring back smoking," Ball said.

The U of M's Jean Forster argues the research is worthwhile. There are states all over the country that are considering similar policies, and the study's findings will help them refute arguments that smoking bans hurt the economy, according to Forster.

She says the research could also help protect Minnesota's new statewide smoking ban.

"There are always challenges to this ban. In fact, there was an attempt to weaken the ban at the Legislature this year," Forster said.

Forster plans to expand on her current research. She has just begun a new study that will look at how bars and restaurants across the entire state fared before and after Minnesota's statewide smoking ban.

©2009 Minnesota Public Radio | All rights reserved
480 Cedar Street, Saint Paul, MN USA 55101 | 651-290-1212
