

# Moving Closer to Tobacco-Free Recreational Areas in Litchfield County Connecticut

JULY 2014

## Summary

Tobacco remains one of the largest public health threats in Connecticut. The Fit Together-Litchfield County Coalition created a *Tobacco-free Parks Toolkit* to assist towns in the development of tobacco-free policies and ordinances for outdoor recreational areas and a *Tobacco-free Workplace Toolkit*. *Parks Toolkits* were distributed to all 26 Park and Recreation Directors and Chief elected officials in the County. *Workplace* toolkits were distributed through the Chamber of Commerce.

To date, six towns (Cornwall, Salisbury, Harwinton, Plymouth, New Milford, and Litchfield) passed a tobacco policy or ordinance that bans smoking in outdoor parks, spaces, and workplaces selected by each town. In addition, 90 outdoor quality *No Smoking* signs were posted in designated areas.



*Now that the Board of Education and the Parks and Recreation campuses are smoke-free, I believe that soon all of Plymouth's Municipal properties will be either smoke-free or have designated smoking areas.*

**- Michael Ganem, Park and Recreation Director, Town of Plymouth**

## Challenge

In Connecticut, 16% of residents 18 years and older—over 428,000 individuals—are current cigarette smokers. Despite successes made, tobacco is still responsible for killing more Connecticut residents than AIDS, drugs, homicide, and suicide combined (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2014). Studies have shown that secondhand smoke kills; in fact, secondhand smoke causes approximately 55,000 deaths per year among nonsmokers. Locally, more than 5,000 Connecticut residents die each year due to smoking and from exposure to secondhand smoke (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2014).

The Environmental Protection Agency has classified second-hand smoke as a *Class A Carcinogen*. This category is reserved for the most dangerous cancer-causing chemicals and it includes such toxins as benzene and asbestos. The *2010 Surgeon General's Report* concluded there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Outdoors, cigarette smoke can be smelled up to 23 feet away. If people can smell smoke, they are inhaling cancer-causing and toxic chemicals.

## Solution

Towns in Litchfield County offer numerous local opportunities to enjoy outdoor recreation year-round, including parks, green spaces, trails, swimming opportunities, as well as state parks and forests. Unfortunately, the county lacks uniform policy language to promote tobacco-free outdoor recreational areas to protect visitors.

Tobacco-free policies and ordinances establish a community norm that tobacco use is unhealthy and unacceptable behavior. Public parks in Litchfield County promote healthy activities and are for the use and enjoyment of residents and visitors. Making our recreational areas tobacco-free makes common sense by:

- Protecting users from the well-documented dangers of secondhand smoke;
- Eliminating unsightly and unhealthy litter;
- Providing the opportunity to model tobacco-free behavior, a powerful tool in teaching children how to be healthy adults.

With funding from a Community Transformation Grant sponsored by the CT Department of Public Health, the Fit Together-Litchfield County Coalition, led by Torrington Area Health District, created a toolkit explaining the health concerns of tobacco use and benefits of tobacco-free outdoor spaces. Information about local authority, as granted through the Connecticut General Statutes, was included in the toolkit to highlight the legal authority of local government to create and enact local ordinances. Several model ordinances were included as examples.

Toolkits were distributed to all 26 Park and Recreation Directors and Chief elected officials in the County. *Tobacco-free Workplace* toolkits were also created and were distributed to workplaces through the Chamber of Commerce. To date, six towns (Cornwall, Salisbury, Harwinton, Plymouth, New Milford, and Litchfield) have passed a tobacco policy or ordinance that bans smoking in outdoor parks, spaces, and workplaces selected by each town. In addition, 90 outdoor quality *No Smoking* signs were posted in designated areas.

The towns that adopted a smoke-free policy or ordinance promoted their efforts in local newspapers to inform residents of the change and the health benefit to the community.

Residents and visitors who frequent parks, playgrounds, recreation areas, and trails will be able to enjoy smoke-free environments.

## Sustainable Success

With the creation of a document that includes specific language for municipalities, as well as through the multi-agency participation of Coalition members, it is expected that the tobacco-free toolkits will be used and referenced for years to come as the "go-to" document for tobacco free policy development and sustainable change. The posted *No Smoking* signs and continued community education through media outreach continue to increase awareness of the ordinance among users of all of these locations providing continuity to what has been accomplished to date.

### Get Involved

Contact the Fit Together-Litchfield County Coalition to see how you can get involved. If you would like to support a tobacco-free recreational area policy in your neighborhood, contact the Torrington Area Health District, 860.489.0436.

### Contact

Torrington Area Health District  
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