



Poll shows support for Illinois smoking ban

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Anti-smoking advocates pointed to a statewide survey Thursday to declare Illinois' six-month-old ban on public smoking a success.

The telephone survey found that 73 percent of the respondents think the state's ban on smoking has been beneficial. The percentage increased by nearly 10 percent since the same company conducted a similar poll a year ago, when the issue was debated statewide.

"Clearly, the public understands that cigarette smoke in the workplace is a serious health hazard," said Joel Africk, president of the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. "Public opinion is key behind smoke-free Illinois."

While advocates say the ban is growing in strength as public support increases, they continue to fight efforts by Illinois casino operators who are claiming a 17 percent loss in revenue since the ban took effect.

The issue is especially a touchy topic in the Metro East area, where smokers can cross the river and light up in casinos and bars.

The leaders of smoke-free Illinois defeated efforts to exempt casinos from the law earlier this year. However, casino leaders are expected to continue to fight for an exemption.

Tom Swoik, executive director of the Illinois Casino Gaming Association, said casino revenue shortfalls translates to less money the state can spend on other projects.

"I suspect that we will continue to try to get some waiver for the casinos," said Swoik.

Health lobbyists succeeded last year in making Illinois the 22nd state to pass a major statewide smoking ban, with the argument that employees and patrons in all public places have a fundamental right to breathe clean air.

The Washington-based firm of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research polled 606 Illinoisans on the smoking ban from May 28 to June 1. The poll was paid for by the American Lung Association of Illinois, the American Cancer Society-Illinois and the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent.