



**Mercury Award
Category 6 –
Public Affairs**

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Smoke Free Columbia Campaign

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6. Public Affairs

The South Carolina Tobacco Collaborative for “Smoke Free Columbia” Campaign

100 Word Summary

The Smoke Free Columbia campaign, coordinated by the South Carolina Tobacco Collaborative, addressed the need for a 100% comprehensive, smoke-free workplace law for all indoor public workplaces, including restaurants and bars, in the City of Columbia in South Carolina. The campaign unveiled its “kick-off” in February of 2006 and gathered petition signatures and organized supporters who favored a smoke-free workplace ordinance, while educating the general public and policymakers on the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure in the workplace. In November 2006, the City of Columbia voted to pass a final reading for a smoke-free workplace ordinance.

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RESEARCH: The EPA classifies secondhand smoke as a human carcinogen, which means it is a cancer-causing substance. Food and beverage service workers have a 50% greater risk of lung cancer than the general population, in part, because of their exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace. In June 2006, the US Surgeon General released a report on the dangers of secondhand smoke, stating that there is no safe level of secondhand smoke exposure. The South Carolina Tobacco Collaborative (SCTC) initiated a public opinion poll in November 2004. Results confirmed that over 78% of Columbia residents supported a law prohibiting smoking in all workplaces and 74% of residents believe that making Columbia smoke free would be good for the City. The SCTC conducted indoor air quality testing in bars in the 29205 zip code area of Columbia during July and August of 2006. Indoor air quality testing results documented that bars in Columbia have dangerously hazardous levels of secondhand smoke exposure, unbeknownst to the most bar patrons and employees.

PLANNING: Message development reflected conclusions made from the research findings. People involved in the planning of the campaign included the SCTC, concerned citizens, and representatives from a variety of local health organizations. The goal of the campaign was to develop a grassroots movement in the City of Columbia so that City Council would recognize the public demand for a smoke-free workplace ordinance for their city, and in turn, vote in favor of an ordinance. Target audiences included constituents; workers and business owners, city council members, and the media. The overall strategy was to emphasize the importance of the hazards of secondhand smoke as a public health issue so that citizens would demand action from their city council members to eliminate secondhand smoke from workplaces and public buildings. The budget for the campaign included \$14,200.00 for promotional materials and \$23,500.00 for advertising equaling a total budget of \$37,700.00.

EXECUTION: Early campaign activities focused on gathering petition signatures through involvement in community events. By the end of the summer, campaign activities focused on receiving media attention on smoke-free workplaces through press conferences, speaking engagements, and appearances on local public affairs shows. In the fall, campaign activities focused on building community support during city council meetings and public hearings. Negative messages, including business owners’ fear of losing revenue, were expected and were countered with studies on the economic benefits of smoke-free policies. Materials used during the campaign included: an official campaign website, “Make it Happen! Smoke Free Columbia” t-shirts, church fans, koozies, yard signs, calendars featuring local bartenders, and laundry boxes stating, “You can wash it out of your clothes, but you can’t wash it out of your lungs. Secondhand smoke kills.” Other nontraditional PR tactics employed include spots on local radio, community event sponsorships and advertisements in local newspapers. Organizations that became involved in supporting the campaign included the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, South Carolina Cancer Alliance, March of Dimes, Palmetto Health, SC DHEC, USC, SC African American Tobacco Control Network, NAACP-Midlands Chapter and the United Way of the Midlands.

EVALUATION: On November 2006 Columbia City Council voted 4-3 in favor of passing a final reading for a smoke-free workplace ordinance that exempted bars. The campaign objective for the petition drive was 4,000 signatures and the Smoke Free Columbia campaign collected 5,200 signatures. In addition, traffic from the website garnered 4,172 unique visitors and 6,207 visits, resulting in 1.48 visits per visitor. Both public hearings were filled to capacity. Forty people spoke in support of a smoke-free workplace ordinance and 10 spoke out in against it. Seventy-nine articles in 13 newspapers were collected during the campaign’s peak, with 82% of the news coverage having a positive viewpoint on a smoke-free ordinance. Earned print media from local newspapers in Columbia garnered 9,341,784 media impressions, with a per capita rate of 13.54 media impressions per person. In addition, positive print media coverage on the smoke-free efforts in Columbia earned an equivalency advertising value of \$62,195.19.