

# WORKING TO PASS A LOCAL ORDINANCE

Have an impact on your community! Work to get a law passed in your city to protect people from secondhand tobacco smoke or stop tobacco sales to kids.

**AGE GROUP:** Middle school or high school and above.

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:** 3 or more students and at least 1 adult.

**TIME:** 3 months or more.

**RESOURCES:** Telephone, computer and printer for writing letters, copying machine, paper, postage, transportation, a camera and film.

**COST:** \$40 or more, depending on extent of activity.

Fighting to pass a local law or ordinance may sound a little overwhelming – but don't dismiss the thought yet! Passing a new law in your city, county or state is one of the most influential things you can do – you're protecting your entire community.

## Examples of legislation you can support:

- A ban on cigarette vending machines
- Tougher penalties on stores that sell to minors
- Making restaurants or other public places smoke-free

You will be reminding your elected officials of the negative effect that tobacco has in their own community and their responsibility to fight it. With a couple of friends and an adult, you can build support and present the issues that directly affect you and those around you to try and make a change in the right direction!

Contact groups in your community that are active in the fight against tobacco such as the local chapters of the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association and American Lung Association. If they are already fighting for an ordinance, they would probably love to have your help. See our Resources section on [page 53](#) for contact information. Don't be afraid to make a huge change in your community. If you can't find any efforts that are already in process, explore on your own! First, find out what tobacco laws already exist – check out this web site from the American Lung Association: <http://slati.lungusa.org/>. Then decide what kind of anti-tobacco ordinance would best improve the quality of life in your town. There are many ways to build support for any ordinance you choose. Here are some ideas to get others involved:

- Collect names on a petition
- Write letters or meet with local officials to discuss your issue
- Get statements of support from influential people and organizations
- Hand out flyers to educate people in the community about the problem
- Organize a rally outside city hall or the state capitol
- Hold a press conference (see our media section on page 50)
- Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper

When you are conducting any of these activities, you must make sure that you have documentation supporting your ordinance. For example, photographs of self-service displays in local convenience stores or a list of places with vending machines easily accessible by young people are great ways to make your issues known. If you are working on secondhand smoke and clean indoor air, document what goes on in smoky restaurants. Show workers serving the smoking section and non-smoking patrons exposed to secondhand smoke.

## The top three things to remember when trying to pass a local ordinance are:

1. **Know both sides.** Know what the opposing side's arguments are going to be, and be ready to create counterpoints when there is public testimony.
2. **Be prepared for last minute changes.** In public meetings, things don't always go the way they're supposed to. Someone that was supposed to speak doesn't show up, or you forgot your notes. Have someone ready to coach your speaker or group. When something goes wrong, it will be that person's job to take care of it.
3. **Numbers show support.** Encourage people who support the ordinance to speak out and go to hearings and other events. Recruit, recruit, recruit!

Juanita Recinos, San Francisco, CA

You can find sample ordinances at Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights: [www.no-smoke.org](http://www.no-smoke.org).

Finally, no matter what policy effort you choose, it is very important to get media coverage to spread the word about the dangers of tobacco use and to put pressure on politicians. (See our media section on page 45.)