

Smokefree Success Stories: Spotlight on smokefree countries



Uruguay

On 1 March 2006, Uruguay became the first 100% smokefree country in the Americas.¹ Uruguay had a successful smokefree campaign despite having historically high smoking rates. Before the legislation came into force, levels of secondhand smoke in Uruguay were among the highest in Latin America.²

Smokefree status	100% smokefree
Smokefree since	March 2006
People protected	3.5 million

Background

The process began some years ago. Uruguay had a decree in place since 1996 with partial restrictions on smoking in public places, but it was never enforced. As a result, when the National Alliance for Tobacco Control³ conducted a nicotine survey in public places, it found smoke contamination in all places measured, including hospital rooms and educational facilities. In fact, the nicotine levels in some public places were very similar to those in bars and pubs.

At the end of 2003, the Pan-American Health Organization's Smoke Free Americas Initiative hosted a workshop on smoke-free environments, in which Uruguay participated as an observer. During the workshop, the Ministry of Health and civil society committed to work together to achieve 100% smokefree environments in all health and education facilities, and public offices within 2 years.

On September 9, 2004, Uruguay ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The process of ratification provided a good opportunity for the public and policy makers to become more aware of the National Alliance for Tobacco Control. That same year, a presidential decree (Decree 98/004) declared that all health establishments should be 100% smoke-free environments.

In 2005, national elections changed the political field of tobacco control when Dr. Tabaré Vázquez became president of Uruguay. As a well-known oncologist, Dr. Vázquez knew very well about the deadly consequences of tobacco use, so he did not hesitate to define tobacco control as a national priority. On the first World No Tobacco Day of his presidency, 31 May 2005, he committed to tobacco control. The Ministry of Health then created a Tobacco Control Program in charge of tobacco control policies.

The next step for smokefree policies included banning smoking in public offices (Decree 215/005), and by September 2005 another decree banned smoking in indoor public places. This ban on smoking in public and private workplaces came into effect on 1 March 2006.

The policy is enforced by Ministry of Health inspectors and citizens, who collaborate with the inspectors acting as observers. These citizen observers cannot fine violators, but do inform the Ministry when someone is breaking the law. The Ministry then carries out an inspection of the place where the violation was committed. In addition, all public places must post a notice about the smoking ban, and must not have ashtrays inside the building.

Penalties for infractions of the law are split into two levels. The first level fine is 100 unidades reajustables (UR), approximately 1,200 US dollars. The second level fine is 200 UR, and the third penalty is closure of the restaurant for three days.

- Public acceptance of the smokefree regulation is high. In November 2006, a public opinion poll showed that 95% of the population agreed that "all workers have the right to work in a 100% smoke-free environment", including 92% of smokers;
- 80% approved of the presidential decree, including almost two thirds of all smokers; and
- almost 90% considered that the law was being obeyed.

The law has already started to have an impact on health – a quarter of smokers said that they were smoking less because of the law.⁴

Only two restaurant owners went to the media saying they would not obey, and they were immediately fined by the Ministry of Health. The only compliance reports are the Ministry of Health inspection records. To date, the reports indicated that only six fines have been issued: two to each of the restaurant owners mentioned above, and two others to two different venues in the interior of the country.

The National Alliance implemented two media campaigns in order to address the issue. The first was to prepare the public to accept the decree, called 'One Million Thanks.' The proposal included collecting one million signatures to thank those who did not smoke in public places. Signatures were collected through leaflets, free phone calls, and the website www.unmillondegracias.com.uy. The campaign was launched by the President himself via a videoconference to the whole country. At the end of the campaign, 1.3 million signatures had been collected.

The second campaign was called 'Smokefree Uruguay.' One of the purposes of this campaign was to launch a national logo for a smokefree environment. This campaign included an interactive informational brochure, a television spot, radio spots, and posters. It was initiated at the 2006 World No Tobacco Day celebrations.

The experience of Uruguay shows that the implementation of 100% smoke-free environments is not only desirable, but also possible, even in countries in Latin America with high prevalence rates and especially when there is political will and the support of civil society.

¹¿Cómo se logró que Uruguay cambiara tanto? Dr. Eduardo Bianco and Catherine Jo. Framework Convention Alliance Bulletin. Issue 69, page 7. July 4, 2007. Available at: http://fctc.org/x/bulletin/COP2_69.pdf. Accessed 10.31.2007
Global Smokefree Partnership. Smokefree in Action: Success Stories – Uruguay. Adriana Blanco. Available at: <http://www.globalsmokefreepartnership.org/evidence.php?id=21&PHPSESSID=f5e660e3234784504bcf8813168be741>. Accessed 10.31.2007

² Navas-Acien A, Peruga A, Breyse P et al (2004).. *JAMA* 291(22):2741-5.

³ Until 2000, individuals and institutions campaigning for smokefree legislation worked in isolation. Then the National Alliance for Tobacco Control was formed. The Alliance is a non-official network of public and private institutions and

civil organizations. It became an umbrella organization, enabling passionate individuals and committed institutions to campaign with a solid foundation.

⁴ Equifax/Mori (2005). Conocimiento y Actitudes Hacia el Decreto 268/005 (unpublished). Available at: <http://www.bvsops.org.uy/pdf/tabaco00.pdf>. Accessed 10.31.07