



105 Mountain Avenue
Summit, New Jersey 07901
908 273-9368
Fax 908 273-9222
www.njgasp.org
E-mail info@njgasp.org

For Immediate Release:
November 9, 2006

Contact: Regina Carlson
New Jersey GASP, Executive Director

Air testing shows bars, restaurants now at safe level; but casinos fail

New Jersey GASP releases tests showing impact of NJ Smoke-Free Air Act

Trenton, New Jersey (Nov. 9, 2006) -- New Jersey GASP released the results of its air testing in restaurants, bars, bowling centers, and casinos, showing the effect of the New Jersey Smoke-Free Air Act (NJ SFAA), at a State House news conference today. In restaurants, bars, and bowling centers, compliance with the law was 100% and air pollution was reduced an average of 91%, based on post-law testing in 2006 several months after implementation of the NJ SFAA, compared to testing in 2005. Employee exposure is now within safe levels, as recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"There was also no change in patron count," said Regina Carlson, Executive Director of New Jersey GASP (Group Against Smoking Pollution), the organization that did the air testing, "and proprietors and employees we interviewed were unanimous in their positive reaction to the law. This law has effected great environmental and health improvement and gone in as smooth as silk. What a great success!"

But in casino gaming areas, where smoking is allowed by the NJ SFAA, levels of fine particle air pollution remained as high as before the law and average employee exposure levels remained twice as high as the EPA recommended maximum. Non-gaming areas, required to be nonsmoking by the law, were more than half as polluted as the gaming areas, because of smoke drifting from the gaming areas and because of smoking in the non-gaming areas, observed in every casino, in violation of the SFAA.

In July, 2006, the New Jersey GASP monitors retested every casino during the state government shutdown, when gambling was suspended, and found that casinos had good air quality, with pollution

levels about half that of the smokefree bars and restaurants. "This was a unique opportunity to measure casino air quality without smoking." said Mark Travers, a researcher at Roswell Park Cancer Institute, New Jersey GASP's partner in the two-year testing project. Travers said, "This demonstrates the good air quality that would be achieved if casinos were required to be smokefree, like all other locations under the SFAA, and if the only significant indoor source of pollution, smoking, were eliminated."

Casino workers and smokefree air advocates at the news conference did demand smokefree casinos. One woman, a casino dealer for 25 years, said, "We, as casino workers, feel that the State of New Jersey is sacrificing our lives." Activists displayed 1,500 letters to legislators asking for smokefree casinos, cited 7,000 signatures on petitions asking for smokefree casinos, and reported resolutions enacted by seven municipal governments where casino workers live, including Atlantic City, that support legislation to make casino smokefree.

Dr. George DiFerdinando, chair of New Jersey Breathes, a coalition of more than 40 health organizations, seconded the workers' plea, "The U.S. Surgeon General has concluded there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke, and the results of this study show that our casinos are a source of high concentrations of secondhand smoke for workers and the public."

New Jersey GASP also announced it has created a comprehensive internet resource "Smokefree gambling – the facts" on its website (www.njgasp.org). "There's factual information, to debunk tobacco and casino industry claims," said Carlson. The website section includes information on conditions in New Jersey casinos, health and safety, economics, legislation, litigation, public support, successful smokefree casinos, and solutions.

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