



F Y I

A service of  
New Jersey GASP  
Group Against Smoking Pollution  
105 Mountain Avenue  
Summit, NJ 07901  
908 273-9368  
Fax 908 273-9222  
www.NJGASP.org  
info@NJGASP.org

## SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/1501ap\\_casino\\_smoke.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/1501ap_casino_smoke.html)

Monday, May 15, 2006 · Last updated 5:23 p.m. PT

### **Nev. study links casino smoke, DNA damage**

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RENO, Nev. -- Five years of research led by a University of Nevada, Reno department head in Reno and Las Vegas casinos have concluded there is a direct correlation between exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace and damage to the employees' DNA.

"The more they were exposed to environmental tobacco smoke, the more the DNA damage, and that's going to lead to a higher risk of heart disease and cancer down the road," said Chris Pritsos.

Funded by a \$2.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health, the clinical trial followed 125 employees who work on the gambling floors of casinos in both northern and southern Nevada.

The subjects of the study were nonsmokers who were not exposed to secondhand smoke in their households, said Pritsos, chairman of the nutrition department at UNR.

"This is the first major study ever done looking at exposure to environmental tobacco smoke in the work force," Pritsos said. He added that casino floor workers are exposed to four times the amount of secondhand cigarette and cigar smoke than any other work force population.

Several Reno area casino executives who were asked by the Reno Gazette-Journal to respond to the study's findings did not return telephone calls.

Frank J. Fahrenkopf, president and chief executive officer of the American Gaming Association, said the smoking issue is a balancing act for casinos.

"In our industry, we realize we have customers who want to smoke, and that's a fact of life," he said. "Our No. 1 priority is the health and welfare of both our customers and our employees, and secondhand smoke poses a real issue for us."

Casinos put a lot of money into air conditioning and ventilation systems to try to accommodate smokers and nonsmokers, Fahrenkopf said.

"Any new major hotel-casino in Nevada is going to have the utmost cutting-edge technology designed to drag that smoke out of there so our employees and nonsmoking customers are not affected," he said. "No system is perfect yet, but we continue as an industry to work on it."

Alex Goldstein, a tourist visiting Reno from San Francisco, said he recently became a nonsmoker but doesn't support banning smoking in all public areas, as Scotland and Ireland have done. "It's a tough issue because smoking kind of infringes on other people's rights," Goldstein said.

Diana Woodbury, a violinist and dancer, won't perform in casinos or other venues that allow smoking.

"It would kill me," said Woodbury, who lives in South Lake Tahoe. "I have asthma and bronchitis, and when I get around smoke, I get pains in my chest."

Even though most casino showrooms no longer allow smoking, Woodbury said the smoke that wafts in from the main casino floor is enough to make her ill. "If I walk past a smoker, within minutes, I can't breathe. I have to use an inhaler," she said.

Woodbury is adamant in her view about the dangers of secondhand smoke. "For every eight smokers that die of smoking, they take one nonsmoker with them. Innocent victims like Dana Reeve," she said.

The widow of the late actor and quadriplegic Christopher Reeve died in March of lung cancer.

"She used to perform in smoky nightclubs and now she's dead," Woodbury said. "Only 44 years old, the same age I am."

The Nevada State Health Division said there are no data available on the number of deaths in the state caused by secondhand smoke.

This year, a secondhand smoke case filed by the widow of a nonsmoker who died at the age of 40 was settled in her favor Jan. 16, 10 years after Larry Ray Thaxton died of lung cancer.

A lifelong nonsmoker, Thaxton worked for the Norfolk Southern Railroad in an outdoor job. Thaxton complained about his constant exposure to co-workers' secondhand tobacco smoke in the bunk cars where he lived during the work week.

The expert witness in the case was James Repace, a physicist who will be helping Pritsos write a scientific paper on the results of the UNR professor's study on the effects of secondhand smoke on casino workers.

"Repape will be doing an analysis of our data in terms of air quality and the environmental tobacco smoke the participants of the study were exposed to," Pritsos said.

The paper first has to undergo a peer review, but Pritsos hopes to submit it for publication by the Journal of the American Medical Association later this year. A preliminary paper based on the results of 50 of the 125 subjects in Pritsos' clinical trial was published last December in Toxicology Letters.