

Survey of Property Owners
Tobacco Use Policies
Counties of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren and Washington

The Siena College Research Institute (SRI) invited landlords in the counties of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren and Washington to complete a survey on their tobacco policies and their attitudes towards those policies on behalf of the Capital District Tobacco Free Coalition and the Southern Adirondack Tobacco Free Coalition between April 20, 2010 and June 28, 2010. As of this writing, 421 landlords responded. The breakdown of responding landlords by county is: Albany (126), Rensselaer (71), Saratoga (88), Schenectady (73), Warren (21), Washington (29) and thirteen landlords (3%) refused to supply a county.

Owners of a Single Building

Slightly more than two-thirds (68%) of all responding landlords own or manage only one building with four or more residential units in the counties under study. The remainder, 32 percent own more than one building. Of the counties with higher response totals – Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady- the percentages of landlords with only one rather than more buildings is very similar. Only the landlords in Saratoga stand out with 75 percent owning one building.

Albany varies from the other counties in the average number of units per building. While the mean number of units per building across the entire sample is 6.7, in Albany (clearly the largest single county sample) the mean is 9.4 while in the four other large county samples, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady, the mean is 5.2, 5.0 and 5.6 respectively.

Computing the number of units represented by this sample we find that this sample of owners of single buildings account for approximately 1,918 units (.68 x 421 x 6.7). Of those units approximately 372 or an average of 1.3 units per landlord are subsidized by a government agency such as Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR). In other words, 19 percent of the units under discussion in this portion of this report are subsidized by the government.

Fifty-six percent of the landlords indicate having indoor smoking rules or policies for their buildings. Rensselaer (63%) and Saratoga (62%) exceed that rate; Albany's rate matches the overall average while the rate of having an indoor smoking policy in Schenectady (39%) is well below the average. Given the relative low number of respondents in Warren (21/margin of error at 95% confidence +/-21 points) and Washington (29/MOE +/- 18 points) we hesitate to draw conclusions from their policy rates of 88 percent in Warren and 44 percent in Washington (it is possible that both are in the low to mid 60's).

Of those with smoking policies, 73 percent have rules prohibiting smoking inside all rental units, 58 percent prohibit smoking in indoor common areas and 12 percent prohibit smoking inside some rental units. Overall, extrapolating to all units, relative to an indoor policy prohibiting smoking inside all rental units, 41 percent of landlords with one building then prohibit smoking inside all rental units (.56 x .73). In Albany that figure is 38 percent, in Rensselaer 52 percent, in Saratoga 48 percent and in Schenectady 29 percent.

Only 17 percent of single building owners have any outdoor smoking rules or policies for their building. Rensselaer is highest at 26 percent followed in descending order by Albany (19%), Saratoga (14%) and Schenectady (6%).

Of those that do have an outdoor policy, 36 percent prohibit smoking in front of building entrances or exits while 38 percent do not allow smoking anywhere on the grounds. Again, it is noteworthy to remember that the net percentages are 6 percent not allowing smoking at entrances and 6.5 percent not allowing smoking anywhere on the grounds.

Multiple Building Owners

On average, multiple building owners manage slightly more than five buildings. The average number of units that these owners/managers oversee is 69 with Schenectady's average being the highest at 95 followed by Saratoga 88, Rensselaer 81 and Albany 57. While single building owners represent over two-thirds of the landlords, a far greater percentage of residential units are accounted for by the 32 percent of landlords managing multiple buildings. These multiple building owners account for approximately 9,268 residential units.

Of those units approximately 16 percent or 1,455 are subsidized by a governmental agency. A greater percentage of units in the Capital District (19%) are subsidized as compared to in the Southern Adirondack region (8%).

While a majority of single building owners have indoor smoking policies, among multiple building owners only 43 percent have such policies. In Saratoga, 59 percent have indoor smoking policies while that rate drops to 48 percent in Rensselaer, 45 percent in Albany, and 29 percent in Schenectady. Seventy-five percent of those that have a policy apply that policy to all the buildings that they own while the balance has unique rules for each building.

Still, of those that have a policy, 68 percent do not allow smoking inside all of their rental units, 68 percent prohibit smoking in indoor common areas and 7 percent allow smoking in some units.

Still it appears that many of the larger owners have inconsistent application of smoking policies. If the 68 percent that prohibited smoking in all properties applied equally across all multiple owners, 2710 units or 29 percent of all units would exist in smoke-free rule systems. However, when we asked those owners that do have a policy to indicate the approximate number of units that they have in which smoking is prohibited inside all of those units, we find a mean of 27.5 or an approximate total of 1083 or 12 percent of all units. Even allowing for error among landlords as they attempted to provide the data, it appears likely that no more than 29 percent and perhaps substantially fewer units within four or more unit buildings owned by multiple building owners have a smoking policy that prohibits smoking inside all units.

Similar to owners of a single building, few landlords that own or manage multiple buildings have outdoor smoking policies. Only 19 percent do overall with the rate slightly higher in the Southern Adirondack region at 23 percent.

History and Attitudes of Owners with Smoking Policy

Combining owners of both a single building and those with multiple buildings, we find that 54 percent of all owners have a smoking policy in place in at least some of their properties. A majority (53%) of those with a policy have had that policy in place for five or more years. Only 1 percent have instituted policies within the last year, 16 percent (12% in CD, 20% in SA) have had a policy more than one year but less than three and 25 percent have had a policy on smoking for more than three years but less than five.

Owners with smoking policies were asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements that probed the impact on their tenants as well as their property management success.

Convincingly, 80 percent agreed (53% strongly) that having a non-smoking policy has lessened their maintenance costs. Only 5 percent disagree and the balance, 15 percent simply could not say. A majority, 61 percent, indicated that they have received positive feedback from tenants and their guests about their non-smoking policy. Again, few disagreed and 27 percent said they just could not say. And 78 percent said that tenants have not complained about the non-smoking rules.

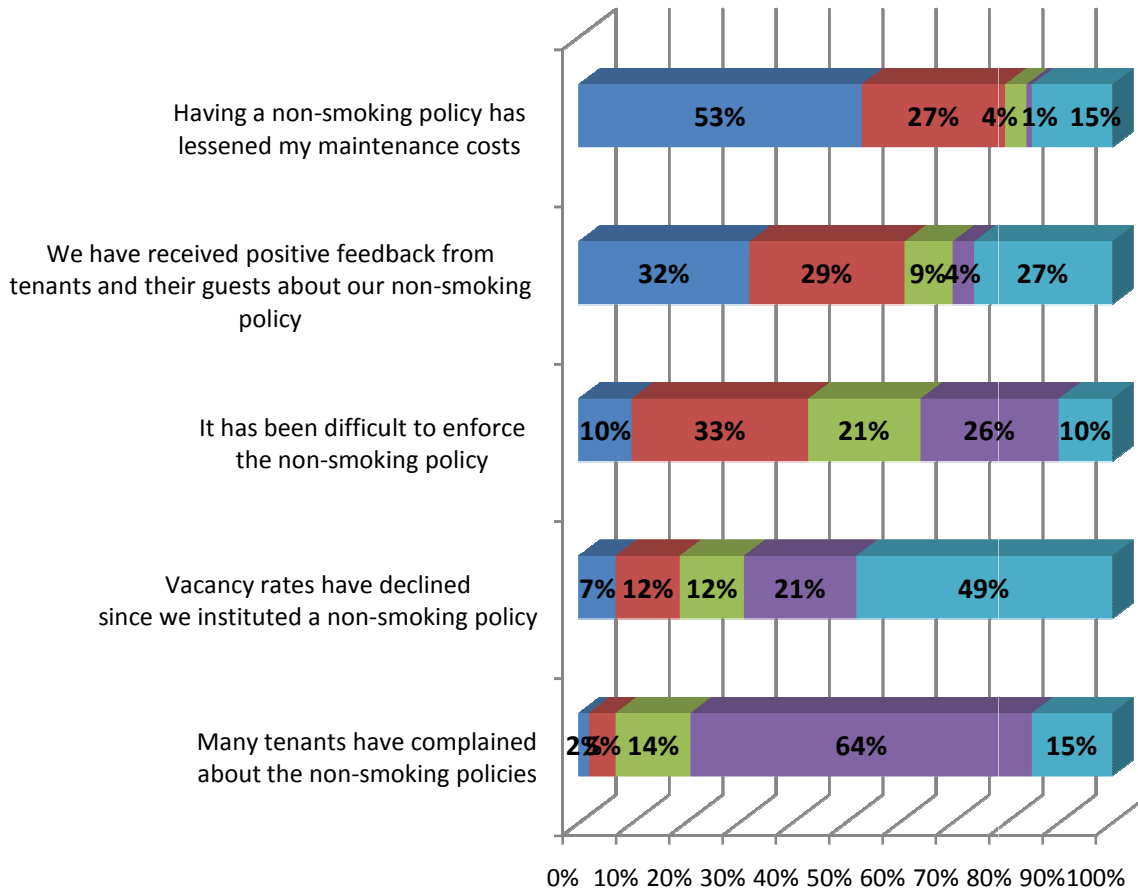
Still despite this positive and non-problematic response to non-smoking policies, only 19 percent indicate that they can attribute vacancy rate declines to their non-smoking policy. And, the enforcement of the policy receives mixed reviews. Forty-three percent (10% strongly) agree that it has been difficult to enforce the non-smoking policy while a small plurality, 47 percent (26% strongly) disagree.

All considered, it does appear that this data, that is, landlords and owners speaking, can be used to inform those without smoking policies that a policy tends to be accepted without complaint from tenants and in some cases appreciated by them and that that policy does lessen maintenance costs.

Two-thirds of owners inform their tenants of non-smoking policies by writing the policy into their lease of contract. Still, the most often cited method of informing tenants of the policy is verbal (81%). Nearly 40 percent (41% CD, 29% SA) refer to smoking policy in property promotions and 7 percent place no smoking signs outside the building or on their property.

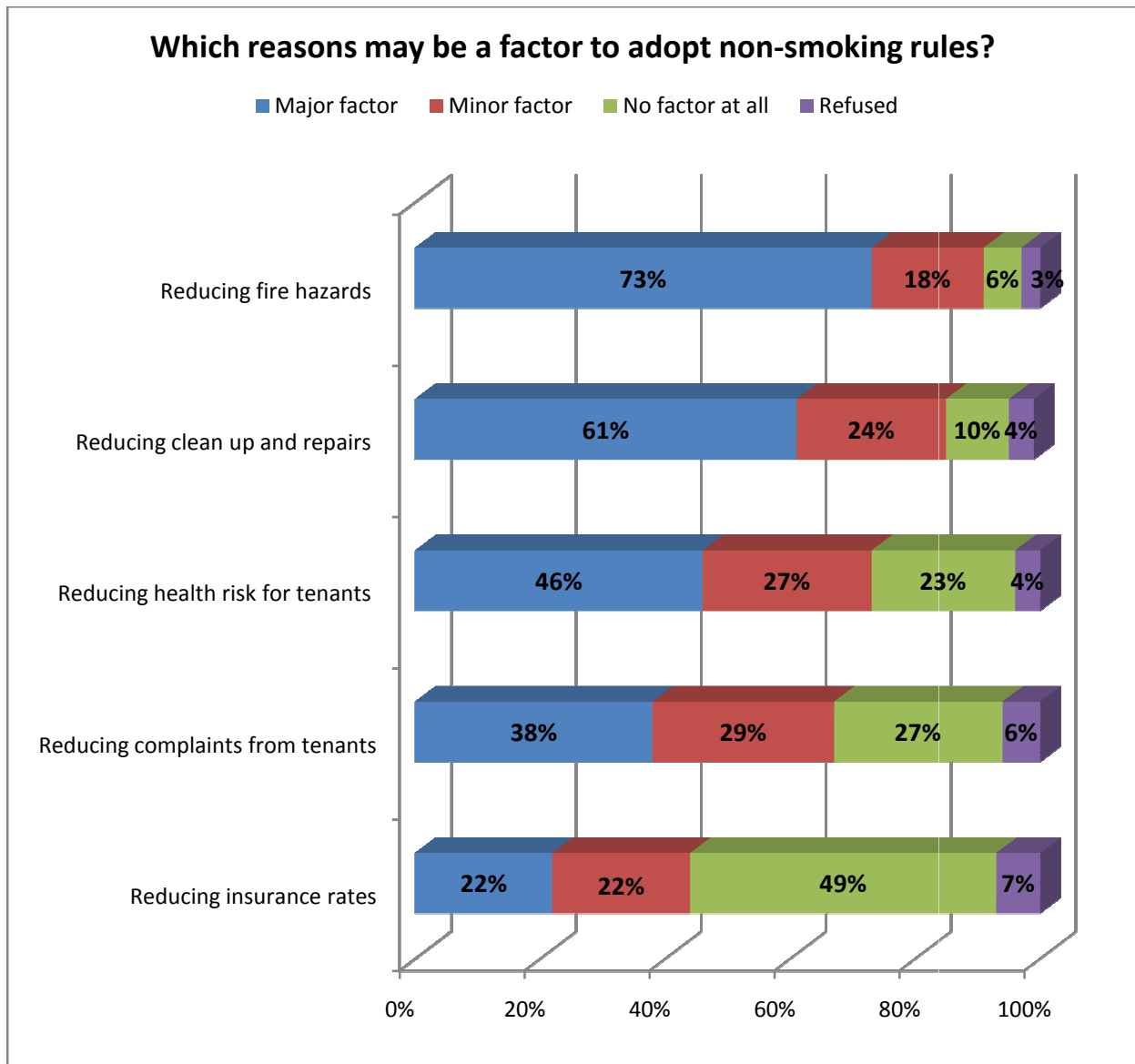
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about smoking in residential buildings

■ Strongly agree
 ■ Somewhat agree
 ■ Somewhat disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree
 ■ Can't say



When asked to think back to their initial decision to adopt non-smoking rules a majority of owners indicate that reducing fire hazards (73%) and reducing clean up and repairs (61%) were a major factor in their decision. Forty-six percent say that reducing the health risk for tenants was a major factor and another 27 percent say that that was a minor factor in their decision. More than half say that reducing complaints from tenants (38% major factor, 29% minor factor) was a factor in their decision. Reducing insurance rates was only a factor of any kind for 44 percent of owners.

As these owners consider the impact that having a non-smoking policy has had on their rental property business, an impressive 84 percent say they are completely satisfied with their decision to implement the policy and an additional 13 percent are somewhat satisfied.



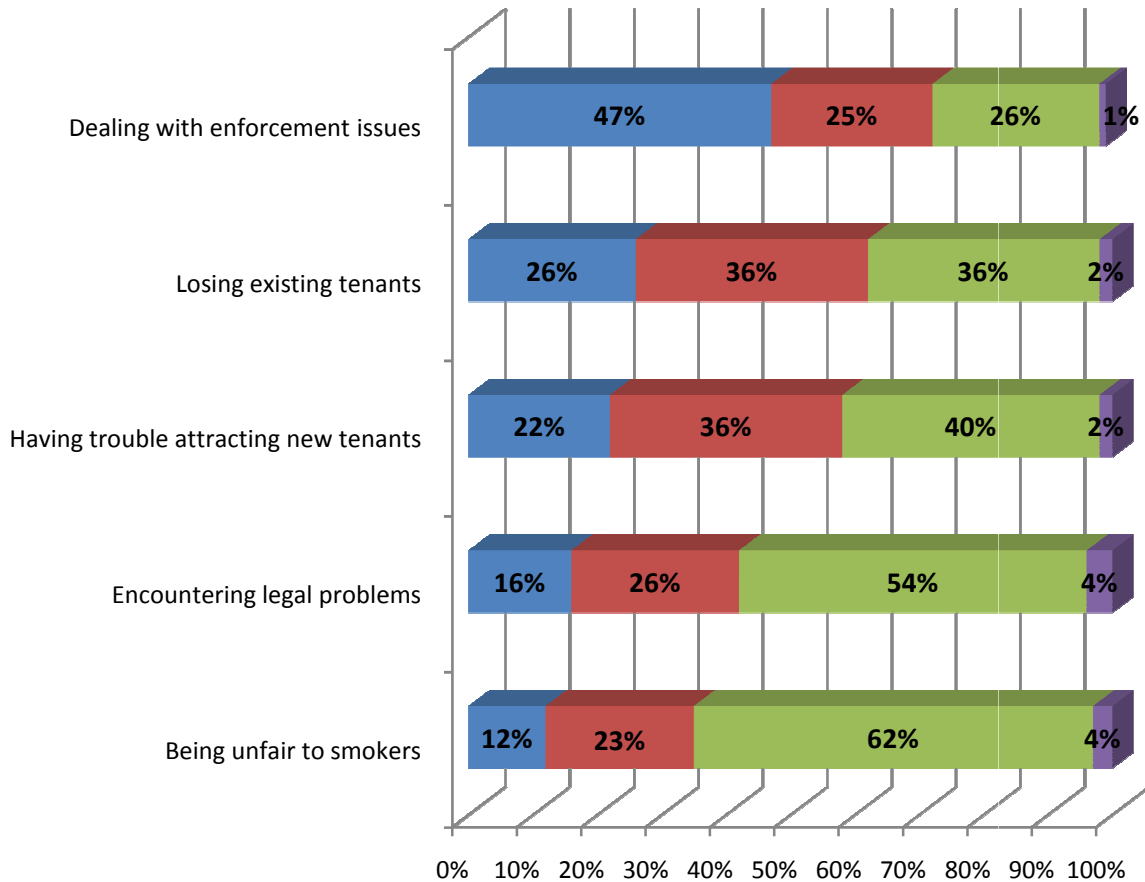
Again, our recommendation would be to use the feedback of these owners in order to attempt to motivate those owners that do not have non-smoking policies to do so.

Owners without Smoking Policies

We asked the 46 percent of owners that do not have any form of smoking policies to rate each of five concerns about instituting a policy as a major concern, minor concern or as no concern at all. The greatest concern they expressed was with dealing with enforcement issues. Forty-seven percent said enforcement issues were a major concern and 25 percent saw enforcement as a minor concern. Given that owners with a policy tend to see enforcement as somewhat problematic this concern is not unfounded. Still, a useful approach that the tobacco free coalition could take would be to address this concern head-on and provide support and guidance with enforcement.

Which concerns are most important when considering to adopt non-smoking rules?

■ Major concern ■ Minor concern ■ No concern at all ■ Refused

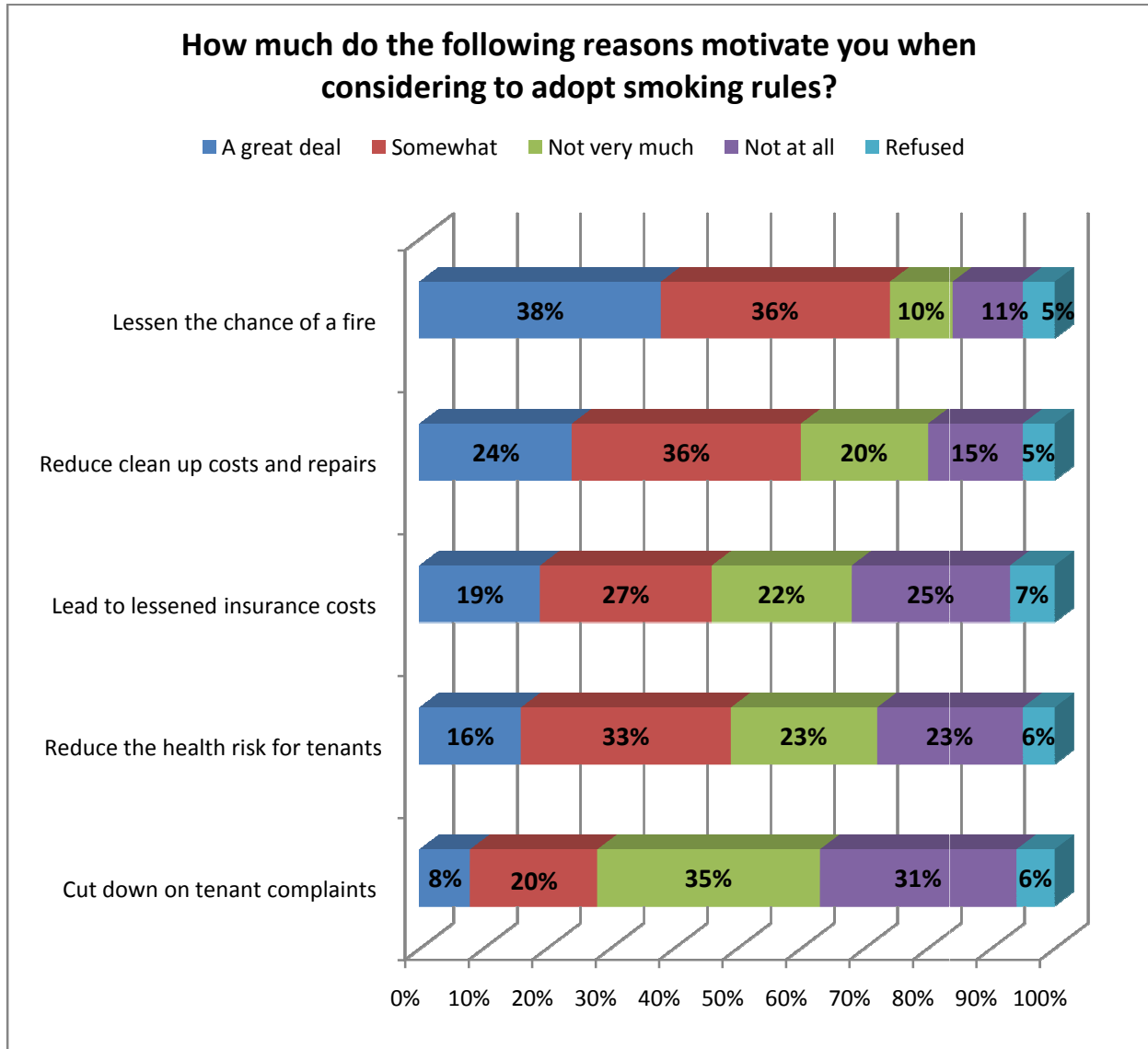


Although smaller, owners without a policy are concerned about losing existing tenants and having trouble attracting new tenants. It would be potentially instructive to highlight the positive feedback owners with a policy have received from their tenants and guests and the small number of complaints they have received.

We then provided owners without a policy a list of reasons that some have cited for why they did institute a policy and asked them whether those reasons would motivate them to consider adopting non-smoking rules.

Among these reasons, most convincing were lessening the chance of a fire, reducing clean up costs and leading to lessened insurance costs. Surprisingly, cutting down on tenant complaints received the least support. One can guess that these landlords are reluctant to believe that a non-smoking policy could reduce tenant complaints. Again, we recommend making that point explicit to them. In that way,

owners can be told, non-smoking policies will 1) reduce fire risk, 2) reduce costs, 3) benefit tenants, 4) be well received in many cases by most tenants, and 5) with clarity and dedication be enforceable with reasonable effort.



That effort faces an uphill climb. Currently, of those that do not have non-smoking policies only 5 percent say at the conclusion of this survey that they are very likely to adopt such a policy. Twenty percent are somewhat likely but 47 percent are not very likely and 23 percent are not at all likely. Nonetheless, we encourage the use of this data, most especially the testimony of those owners that have benefitted from the adoption of a policy and can neutralize the enforcement concerns while at the same time highlight the benefits to continue to educate and encourage owners without a policy. At the same time, tobacco free coalitions should continue to provide owners with the tools including lease language, signage, enforcement systems and cost reduction data, that makes instituting non-smoking policies easier.