

Owners: Smoke be gone

Businesses aim to keep entries free of any air pollution

By DAVE NORDSTRAND
The Salinas Californian

Salinas businesses, such as Adelita's Ricos Tacos, 1002 A Del Monte Ave., realize that a tobacco smoke-free entryway is a customer-friendly entryway.

Like the tidy taqueria with its red-and-white checkered tablecloths, several other businesses have gone ahead to rid such spaces of the leading preventable health hazard, tobacco smoke.

"Because a bus stop is near by, people stood at the corner of our building and smoked," said Juan Barrios, who owns the taqueria with his wife Adela. "The smoke would come in the door. Sometimes it was terrible."

He and his wife do not smoke, and they didn't appreciate the secondhand drift.

"Our customers didn't appreciate it either," Adela said.

So the two posted a free bilingual "No Smoking" sign. It asked people not to light up within 20 feet of an entryway or window.

The sign came from Steps to a Healthier Salinas, which is asking businesses and property managers to post similar signs in their windows.

Steps is part of the Monterey County Health Department and also part of a national effort to make America a healthier place.

Its programs seek to change behavior so as to reduce the risks of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, cancer and other killers.

Cristina Pitts, with Steps, visits small businesses, such as Adelita's, and churches, too.

She asks if they will post the signs. She works with property managers, too. That way, the No Smoking effort becomes policy and doesn't change as one business leaves and another moves in.

"Here at the taqueria, the idea is to keep customers from second-hand smoke from the time they enter until they order and eat their food," Pitts said.

The program is voluntary, said Elan Bobay with Steps.

"Second-hand smoke, especially, has an impact on children," Bobay said. "Even a smoker

wouldn't want a child exposed."

No doubt remains that tobacco smoke is a major threat to public health.

"Smoke is officially considered air pollution," Bobay said. "It's up there with car smog."

Many people exposed to secondhand smoke suffer instant breathing difficulties, eye irritation, headaches, nausea and asthma attacks, Bobay said.

DETAILS

For information, or to receive a free decal, call Elan Bobay at 755-4625 or Cristina Pitts at 755-4619, Steps to a Healthier Salinas contacts at the Monterey County Health Department.

For smokers seeking to quit, The California Smokers' Help line is at (800) 662-8887.

Help line services are free and funded by the California Department of Health



SCOTT MACDONALD/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Adela and Juan Barrios, owners of Adelita's Taqueria on the corner of Del Monte Avenue and Sanborn Road in Salinas, have put up a sign to keep smokers away from the entrance to their business

RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Other secondhand smoke facts from Steps:

Secondhand smoke causes as many as 53,000 deaths in the U.S. each year.

- Tobacco use causes 11 major health problems to include respiratory disease, lung and nasal sinus cancer and heart disease.
- Because their lungs are not fully developed, young children are particularly susceptible to secondhand smoke. Exposure is linked to an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia.

The Steps effort mirrors the greater anti-smoking campaign. On April 4, for example, the City of Monterey became the third in the county to prohibit tobacco use on a city-owned beach.

Pacific Grove and Carmel already have such restrictions.

Because 83 percent of Californians do not smoke, it also makes good business sense to post the No Smoking signs, Bobay said.

"This is about respecting the rights of nonsmokers," she said.

Originally published April 12, 2006