

FAQ

Tobacco-Free Workplace

What are the tobacco-free policies and when will they begin?

Starting July 2, 2018 Austin Energy is implementing its tobacco-free worksite policy, meaning that all owned and operated property, including parking lots, City-owned or leased vehicles, and personal vehicles parked on AE property will become tobacco-free.

What is meant by “tobacco”? Is it just cigarettes?

The tobacco-free policy through Austin Energy include all tobacco products, not just cigarettes. Tobacco products include cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, snuff, snus, dip, pipe tobacco, electronic cigarettes, and any non-FDA approved nicotine delivery device.

Why is Austin Energy taking away my right to use tobacco products?

AE is not requiring that you quit using tobacco. You may continue with your choice to use tobacco products, but not on AE owned or operated worksites.

Why is Austin Energy making these policies?

Austin Energy is committed to providing safe and healthy worksites and promoting the health and well-being of its employees. Personal health hazards, fire hazards, worksite inefficiencies, and financial costs related to use of all tobacco products are numerous and have been well documented. The health hazards related to smoking impact both smokers and non-smokers who are exposed to second-hand smoke. We care about the health and safety of each and every employee, and our intent is to provide all employees and visitors with a work environment conducive to good health, safety, and sound financial practices. There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Our employees and visitors have the right to breathe clean air and thus will be able to work and visit AE without having to face the threat of second-hand smoke.

AE is dedicated to providing a healthy work environment to its employees in order to not only preserve individual health, but to also cut the healthcare costs and loss of productivity due to absenteeism and abuse of break time that is related to having a workforce that uses tobacco. This tobacco-free policy, coupled with the available cessation resources offered, will support the employees who are trying to quit and protect all from exposure.

Is tobacco use a serious problem in our community?

Yes. Tobacco use remains the number one preventable cause of death and disability in the United States, in Texas, and in Austin/Travis County. In 2015, the prevalence of tobacco use in Austin/Travis County was **16.6%**. It is estimated that **801** deaths in 2014 were due to tobacco in Travis County.

Cigarettes alone are responsible for more than **480,000 deaths per year** in the United States - approximately one in five deaths annually, or **1,300 deaths every day**. On average, smokers die 10 years earlier than nonsmokers. For every person who dies from tobacco use, another **20 continue** to suffer with at least one serious tobacco-related illness.

There is no risk-free level of exposure to second-hand smoke; yet **1 in 4 nonsmokers** in the US are still exposed to secondhand smoke. Nonsmokers who are exposed to second-hand smoke are inhaling the same cancer-causing substances and poisons as smokers. Second-hand smoke

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contains more than 70 cancer-causing chemicals. It is estimated that more than **41,000 deaths per year** result from second-hand smoke exposure. Second-hand smoke causes numerous health problems in infants and children, including severe asthma attacks, respiratory infections, ear infections, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). In adults, second-hand smoke exposure causes cardiovascular disease (heart disease and stroke) and lung cancer.

What support is available to help employees quit using tobacco?

The City of Austin's wellness program, Healthy Connections, offers Tobacco Cessation 101 classes, and it's available to employees, spouses, and retirees. Those covered by a City Medical Plan and who attend the first class are eligible to receive cessation medication (includes nicotine replacement therapy) FREE for 9 months. Learn more at

<http://cityspace.ci.austin.tx.us/services/healthyconnections/tobacco-cessation>. Sign up for a class on TRAIN.

In addition, *FREE* community cessation resources include the Texas Quitline at 1-877-Yes-Quit and the SmokefreeTXT program by texting 'AUSTIN' to 47848. The Texas Quitline provides free phone or web counseling, and SmokefreeTXT is a free, personalized text message-based program.

Why is this a priority for Austin Energy now?

AE is enacting a tobacco-free policy on its worksites because it believes that ensuring a healthy work environment is key to providing quality service.

How will this tobacco-free policy be enforced?

Self-enforcement is expected, and may take time to become the norm. If you suspect violation or observe a violation of the policy, you may remind the offender of the policy and ask them to voluntarily comply. You can also bring the situation to the attention of an Austin Energy supervisor or manager. For AE employees, violations will be enforced similar to violation of any other established AE personnel policy and procedure.