

Pink Collar Blues...

The topic of secondhand smoke is an important health issue to women. Statistically, women are more likely than men to suffer the dangers of secondhand cigarette smoke. This is why we are speaking out.

Background

I have a friend, named Carrie, who works in a trendy restaurant and bar environment. She complains about the unhealthy conditions all the time, but is afraid to come forward out of fear of losing her job. Some people tell her she should quit, but that isn't an option for her. She's halfway through her university program, and is unable to work a traditional 40 hr/wk job. When classes are in session, she works 20 hr/wk. Anyone who has worked as a part-time employee knows it is extremely difficult to make ends meet on part-time pay. Therefore, she works the bar Friday and Saturday shifts and fills in occasionally. Without this schedule, she would be unable to finish her education.

Carrie manifests many symptoms from the harmful toxins contained in secondhand smoke. Her sinuses become inflamed--leading to headaches, migraines, and occasionally, infections that can last for weeks. By the end of a normal work night, her throat is sore and raw. Her voice is scratchy, and at times, she can barely speak. She describes the feeling as breathing tiny little razors all night long. The smoke particles just seem to be cutting away at her generally healthy tissues.

Carrie Asks

Why does the City of Albuquerque protect some workers, but not ALL workers? Why doesn't the city protect people like me? Am I not important as well?

Carrie has expressed many times that it seems like the City of Albuquerque protects people who are wealthy, those who are powerful or hold traditional white collar jobs. The city doesn't protect the little person. And, in her case, the city doesn't seem to care about women. Females hold more wait staff positions than do men. To Carrie, it seems the City of Albuquerque protects men more than it does women.

Economic Issues

Carrie hears a lot about the politics of secondhand smoke. She believes it comes down to a couple key issues: Business owners say they will lose money if the city requires them to restrict smoking. While studies show this is generally false, Carrie asks if profits are more important than her health?

Some owners say they have the right to run their business the way they want. Do we allow restaurants or bars to serve poisoned meat or tainted water? Why is air quality any different?



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Smokers' Concerns

Like all of us, Carrie has friends who smoke. Some of them express they have a "right" to smoke. She does not question this. She only asks whether she has an equal right not to smoke?

Carrie does not care whether people smoke or not. She has made a choice that is right for her. She believes smoking should be an adult decision. Yet, clearly, she cannot understand why the City of Albuquerque forces her to smoke while she works. She is there to help people. She tries to do her job professionally, be polite and courteous at all times, and help other people have an enjoyable experience. She asks only that smokers "do their thing" in a way that does not endanger her.

In her current job, Carrie moves from table to table throughout the establishment. There is no way to escape the secondhand smoke. At times, only a few people are smoking. At other times, the entire place is thick with dense smoke. She never gets a break.

A Question of Fairness

Carrie asks the city to be fair to ALL people. If some establishments permit smoking, while others cannot, it creates inequities. If the law is comprehensive, it's fair. She asks the Council to pass a 100% smokefree law. Please consider our health.