

NEWS RELEASE



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For release: July 21, 2006

Arkansas Joins Exclusive Group of Smoke-Free States

Governor Huckabee touts health, economic benefits of the Clean Indoor Air Act

Friday, July 21, 2006; LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – Arkansas joined the small but growing list of states in the U.S. that have enacted smoke-free legislation as **Governor Mike Huckabee** announced that the **Clean Indoor Air Act** went into effect today. The announcement was made at a news conference held at the **Dixie Café** on Rebsamen Park Road in Little Rock.

The new law (*Act 8*), enacted to protect workers, children and senior citizens from the hazardous effects of secondhand smoke, bans smoking in workplaces and public areas statewide, including most restaurants and bars. It also requires business owners with three or more employees and businesses, regardless how many people they employ, that are open to the public to ban smoking in all indoor, enclosed areas. There are a number of businesses that may be exempt from the law. A list of the types of workplaces to which the act does and does not apply is available at www.ARCleanAir.com or by calling toll-free 1-800-235-0002.

Governor Huckabee framed the new law in the larger context of his Healthy Arkansas initiative by focusing on the health and economic benefits that a statewide smoking ban would bring to Arkansas. He cited the success of similar clean air laws in other communities and states across the nation.

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“We’ve come a long way, since Healthy Arkansas began two and a half years ago, towards our goal of making Arkansas one of the healthiest states in the nation. I believe today is a giant leap towards that objective and a historic day for Arkansans,” said Gov. Huckabee during his remarks. “Not only are we a healthier state because of this legislation, but research shows that smoke-free communities and states also see economic benefits. This legislation will positively affect everyone.”

The governor also pointed to the success of The Dixie Café, whose owners made the decision over a year ago to become smoke-free and have seen a positive effect on their business. A representative from Dixie Café commented that the majority of their guests welcomed the change.

Legislation for the *Arkansas Clean Indoor Air Act* was introduced by Tracy Steele, Paul Miller and Shawn Womack in the Senate and Sid Rosenbaum, Nathan George and Jay Bradford in the House during a special session of the Arkansas legislature in 2006. It was passed on April 6, 2006.

“Our goal was to create a comprehensive piece of legislation that would protect Arkansans from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke and make Arkansas a healthier place to live and work,” said Senator Steele. “Beginning today, Arkansas will be a healthier state.”

The Governor was joined by the state’s chief medical officer, Dr. Joe Thompson and Dr. Jennifer Dillaha, director of the Center for Health Advancement. Dr. Thompson explained the details of the new law and urged individuals with questions to visit www.ARCleanAir.com or call the toll free number, 1-800-235-0002.

“We’re going to be working with businesses to educate them about the law and provide them with all the tools they need to be fully compliant,” said Dr. Thompson. “Although the law goes into effect today, businesses will be given time to adjust and we’re going to do everything we can to make the transition as smooth as possible.”

Dr. Dillaha talked about how the law would be enforced and how violations will be reviewed. According to Dr. Dillaha, businesses that repeatedly violate the law will go before the State Board of Health and may be subject to civil fines up to \$1,000 and criminal fines up to \$500.

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“We’re going to rely primarily on complaints filed online or mailed in and calls to our toll free number to enforce this new legislation,” said Dr. Dillaha. “Educating business owners about the requirements of the law will be the first step in following up on a complaint. There won’t be a ‘puff police’ patrolling the state, but we want business owners to know that we’re serious about enforcement.”

Dr. Dillaha also stressed that workers who report violations at their places of employment will be protected by law. She emphasized that Arkansas’ workforce is one of the groups that will benefit from the clean air legislation and that employees had a right to breathe smoke-free air while on the job.

Also on hand was Dr. Gary Wheeler from the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Arkansas. Dr. Wheeler’s organization is leading a campaign that encourages Arkansans to support restaurants that will now be smoke-free by taking their families out to eat on the weekend that the law goes into effect. To support the Coalition’s effort, Governor Huckabee proclaimed the weekend of July 21-23 to be “Breathe In, Dine Out Days,” an opportunity for families to go out to eat in restaurants that are now smoke-free because of the *Clean Indoor Air Act*.

Individuals who would like more information about the new law and smoke-free compliance are encouraged to call the Healthy Arkansas toll-free number at 1-800-235-0002 or visit the Web site, www.ARCleanAir.com.

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