

POOR AIR QUALITY PERSISTS IN CASINO RESTAURANTS DESPITE INDOOR AIR ACT

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LAS VEGAS – January 6, 2009 – More than two years after Nevada voters passed legislation banning smoking in a majority of the state’s indoor public places and all of its restaurants, researchers from UNLV and the University of Kentucky have found that restaurants in some Southern Nevada casinos still contain unsafe levels of secondhand smoke.

With the close proximity of non-smoking restaurants to smoking-allowed gaming areas, UNLV assistant professor of nursing Nancy York and Kiyong Lee, associate professor of public health at the University of Kentucky, measured air quality samples from 16 casinos in Southern Nevada to gauge the relationship between overall indoor air quality and restaurant air quality.

Researchers tested eight on-Strip and eight off-Strip casino restaurant and gaming areas in Henderson and Las Vegas between November 2007 and March 2008. While all tested casino restaurant areas had less secondhand smoke pollution than casino gaming areas, 12 of 16 restaurants tested contained air pollution levels exceeding the annual U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommendation for air quality.

Three of these 12 restaurants exceeded levels recommended by the EPA as safe for children, the elderly and those with heart or lung diseases.

“Even though casino restaurants are supposed to be non-smoking by state law, the open air floor plan of casinos creates a shared air space, resulting in secondhand smoke migrating from the gaming floor into the restaurants and creating health hazards of secondhand smoke exposure to those present, whether it is workers or patrons,” said Nancy York,

UNLV assistant professor of nursing and lead investigator on the study. “Secondhand smoke naturally drifts in the air currents and ventilation systems can distribute secondhand smoke throughout a building.”

Air quality in gaming areas of all casinos tested exceeded levels the EPA recommends as safe, confirming previous studies showing that the majority of casino gaming areas have unsafe levels of air pollution.

“These findings have serious life-threatening consequences for casino employees and patrons,” said York. “Previous research has found smoke-filled casinos can have up to 50 times more cancer-causing particles in the air than highways and city streets during rush hour traffic. Our research helps to confirm this.”

Chris Pritsos, a University of Nevada, Reno professor, found in his previous research that casino employees exposed to secondhand smoke at work suffer from increased DNA damage, which can lead to greater risks of developing cancers and heart disease.

York plans to expand the study to include additional non-smoking areas in casinos such as day care areas, movie theaters, arcades and bowling alleys.

The Nevada Clean Indoor Air Act was enacted in December 2006 and prohibits smoking in all indoor spaces in Nevada with the exception of areas typically off-limits to children, including casino gaming areas.

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