

# ECONOMIC STUDY | checklist

**What makes a study of smokefree impacts “good” – and why?**

Use this checklist to evaluate any study of smokefree’s economic impact. The more check marks you can make, the more confidence you can have in the study’s results.

**Did the study measure what actually happened – or only what people feared would happen?**

Because of the tobacco industry’s long propaganda campaign, many restaurateurs believe that smokefree laws will cost them business. Surveys asking people what they expect to happen usually come up with negative predictions. These polls actually measure the effectiveness of tobacco industry propaganda, not the economic impact of taking restaurants and bars smokefree. Subjective measures, such as polls asking people what they *thought* happened, are also subject to manipulation (such as by biasing the sample being polled).

**Did the study uses hard numbers (such as actual revenues or employment statistics collected by an unbiased source?)**

To be credible, a study should be based on “hard data” (objective measures) collected by a neutral party (such as a public revenue or workforce agency) with no interest in whether or not smokefree laws affect the hospitality industry. The data should include all businesses, so business conditions can be accounted for.

**Did the study include information from a reasonable time before the policy went into effect?**

The economy changes over time in several ways: (1) there are good times and bad, (2) there is inflation, (3) there is seasonal variation, (4) there are random fluctuations due to the weather and other extraneous factors. By collecting data for several years before the smokefree policy takes effect, it is possible to quantify these trends and effects and take them into account. This is important so that some normal (or random) fluctuation in the economy is not attributed (one way or the other) to the ordinance.

**Did the study account for underlying trends and random fluctuations in the business cycle?**

See above.

**Did the study use at least one year’s data (usually four economic quarters) to assess the measure’s effects?**

It is virtually certain that sales in any quarter (or other reporting period) will be higher or lower than an earlier quarter simply because of random fluctuations in the economy. By waiting until you have at least one year’s experience, it is more likely that these random fluctuations will balance out, ensuring that any effects attributed to the smokefree policy (positive or negative) are not simply chance variations.

**Does the study account for underlying economic conditions?**

If the overall economy is up or down, this will affect the hospitality business. To ensure that any changes reported are actually due to the smokefree policy, one needs to account for these effects. A common way is to express restaurant revenues as a fraction of all retail sales.

**Is the study’s funding source disclosed?**

Studies funded by the tobacco industry (directly or indirectly) often fail to disclose the source of support.

**Is the study financed by an agency that has no ties with the tobacco industry?**

As of January 2002, the only studies claiming that smokefree policies have a negative effect on the hospitality industry were ones paid for by the tobacco industry, its allies, or front groups. Just like studies of secondhand smoke (tobacco industry affiliated studies in that field are 88 times more likely to conclude that secondhand smoke is benign), affiliation with tobacco strongly predicts a negative finding. If the study is sponsored by a restaurant association, is it an independent group – or one with financial or other ties to the tobacco industry?

**Is the study in a “peer reviewed” journal?**

“Peer review” is how academic studies are evaluated by disinterested third-parties. When a paper is sent to an academic journal, the editor typically sends the manuscript to 1-3 outside reviewers with no stake in the study. (Their identities are generally not disclosed to the author; some journals do not tell the reviewers who the author is.) After the reviewers critique the study, the editor accepts or rejects the paper, often after requiring revisions to address the reviewers’ comments. While the process is not perfect (the tobacco industry has ties to some journals and editors), it increases the chance that the study used appropriate methodology and a proper sample.



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