



# Focus on...

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

### Tobacco reduction takes public-private partnerships



*Barker Implement mechanic Mitch Doolittle is trying to quit chewing tobacco. Part of the reason is that he can no longer use tobacco at work. What's more, Mitch supports the company's new policy.*

When policymakers speak of the importance of private-public partnerships, few agencies understand this better than public health. From promoting healthy behaviors, to preventing injury, to protecting against environmental hazards, everyone in the community has a stake. An especially important partner in these efforts is Iowa employers.

Employers like Barker Implement.

With 182 employees in eight locations across southern Iowa, this full-service John Deere dealer understands the benefit of building a healthier workforce. In 2009 Barker Implement Wellness Coordinator Lynn Irr was charged with tackling the company's number one health risk—tobacco use.

“Our workforce is primarily male and very traditional in nature,” Irr says. “Many of them grew up farming and living in economically depressed rural communities. Their role models have always been men such as their fathers, grandfathers, and uncles, many of whom smoked or chewed tobacco.”

Baseline studies showed this to be the case; 31 percent of the Barker Implement staff surveyed were tobacco users in 2009. “Since this health survey was voluntary, however, we can infer that actual tobacco use rate was even higher” Irr said. “It could have been as high as 40 percent.”

Whatever the case, the number of tobacco users in this environment was particularly high compared with the rest of the state. The 2008 Iowa Adult Tobacco Survey indicated that slightly less than 19 percent of the general population was using some type of tobacco product,

### Policy Excerpts

**“To promote a healthy work environment and healthier employees, Barker Implement will become tobacco-free (buildings, company vehicles and all farm equipment) for all locations effective January 1st, 2011...”**

**“...Tobacco is defined as, but not limited to cigarettes, cigars, spit and smokeless tobacco, chew, snuff, snus, hookah-smoked products, bidis, kreteks and cigarillos...”**

**“... Workplaces that allow tobacco use result in higher absenteeism, lower productivity, increased cleaning/maintenance costs and increased health insurance rates...”**

**“...The Barker's wellness coordinator can assist as well as provide information to any employee or employee family member who wishes to become tobacco free...”**

including cigarettes. “You can see what we were up against,” Irr added.

Like many businesses and organizations, Irr turned to the local community tobacco prevention partnerships funded by the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). With services available in the eight counties in which Barker Implement has dealerships, these community partnerships began by offering educational seminars during employee lunch breaks. An especially helpful strategy during these sessions was introducing Quitline Iowa (1-800-QUIT-NOW). The state’s free telephone helpline helps Iowans break their addiction to nicotine through personalized quit plans.

And it worked. Within the first year, not only had employees begun to quit or reduce their tobacco use, but an internal survey indicated 73 percent of employees supported moving forward with a tobacco-free campus policy.

“This was a giant step forward,” says IDPH Community Health Consultant Maggie O’Rourke. “Since July 2008, Iowa’s Smokefree Air Act has been protecting employees from the dangers of secondhand smoke, but it only applies to enclosed spaces such as offices. Furthermore, the clean air legislation doesn’t cover the use of chewing tobacco or other types of deadly smokeless tobacco products. For an agricultural business such as Barker Implement to consider a policy that prohibits all types of tobacco use anywhere on company grounds is indeed a bold decision.”

Irr remained in close contact with local community partnerships as the company planned its next steps in reducing tobacco use—offering employees financial support for cessation medication, as well as underwriting the insurance deductible for doctor’s office visits to discuss tobacco cessation. In addition, the company offered to reduce by \$50 the monthly insurance premiums of employees who met certain wellness criteria, including avoiding or quitting tobacco use.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Between 2009 and 2010, Irr says that 9 percent of employees who used tobacco reported that they had either reduced tobacco use or quit altogether. Meanwhile the company was working with the community partnerships on developing a policy that would prohibit tobacco use on company property.



*Parts Sales Representative Tedd Hutt supported the tobacco-free policy that was piloted at his dealership in Clarinda. Now that the policy is in place in every location, all Barker Implement buildings, vehicles, and farm equipment are almost as clean as Tedd’s parts store.*

Among the first people Irr called was Judy Boye, coordinator of Free People from Tobacco, which serves Fremont, Montgomery, Page, and Taylor counties. Boye had worked with Barker Implement the previous year to provide on-site educational presentations to employees interested in quitting smoking. “I don’t know how Lynn got my name originally, but I certainly wasn’t surprised,” Boye says. “We work with so many organizations on tobacco issues. Our name kind of gets around.”

After discussing Barker Implement’s needs, Boye explained the pros and cons of policies that apply only to smoking compared to those that cover all tobacco use, including chew, spitless tobacco, and dissolvable products. “Lynn was interested in seeing what other companies had done, so I provided a couple of sample policies that seemed the most appropriate to Barker’s work

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**- Barker Implement Wellness Coordinator Lynn Irr**

# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

environment and wellness objectives,” Boye says. “I also encouraged Lynn to consider a measured approach in introducing these changes by piloting their new policy in just one of their eight worksites to see how it would go over.”

As Irr worked on the policy that would be piloted at their Clarinda facility, more sample policies came in from the other community partnerships serving the eight counties in which Barker Implement has operations. “By the time I got the last of the samples, I had drafted the policy so I was able to use them to make sure there weren’t things I had forgotten,” Irr says. “Having so many resources made writing the policy much easier. All public health departments were very helpful in providing policy samples and offering to review what we had come up with.”

With continued discussions between management and employees about the company’s wellness efforts, additional opportunities to work with the community partnerships emerged. Irr says that this second round of educational efforts included smaller but more targeted activities at many of the worksites. “Peggy Kost from Decatur County Public Health even walked around our shop in Leon talking to employees, offering support, and handing out Quitline Iowa promotional material such as fliers, pens, and stress balls,” Irr recalls. “As we got closer to implementing our company-wide policy, Peggy also helped us locate signage for all eight buildings.”

On January 1, 2011, Barker Implement transitioned from its pilot period to a company-wide tobacco-free policy that prohibits the use of any tobacco products—from cigarettes

to chewing tobacco to dissolvable products—in all company owned buildings, company vehicles and farm equipment. When introducing the policy, management also decided to lay the groundwork for an even more comprehensive policy that would take effect a year later on January 1, 2012. The forthcoming policy extends the current policy by prohibiting the use of all types of tobacco on the “grounds, parking lots, ramps, sidewalks or any property owned by the company across the street from any of our locations.”

“This is a great example of a company showing that they’re serious about reducing tobacco use among their employees,” O’Rourke added. “The nicotine contained in tobacco products is one of the most addictive substances we know of. With 83 percent of Iowa smokers saying they want to quit, this deliberate, thoughtful, and measured approach to policy development recognizes that people will need time to adapt. In addition, Barker Implement continues to take a step in the direction of those employees who want to quit by conducting education, providing financial incentives, and promoting Quitline Iowa.”

Irr says that the full effect of the current policy won’t be evident until late 2011, by which time she says she’ll have aggregate data of the number of current tobacco users in the company. So far, though, she says it’s looking good. “We started in 2009 with 31 to 40 percent of our workforce using tobacco,” Irr says. “As of November 2010, our best estimates indicate that this number is somewhere between 19 percent and 23 percent. I expect the upcoming Nov 2011 employee biometric screenings will be the best indicator of the effect of our new policy and I’m very excited. We see action and folks are making quit attempts throughout the company.”



*It helps to have a sense of humor. Even with the support from his employer, Knoxville mechanic Brad Parker (left) jokes that quitting tobacco is so stressful he’s “chewed up all the cushions on my sofa at home.” Although his co-worker Kyle Thompson blames Brad for introducing him to chewing tobacco, he provides him with a tractor seat cushion to relieve his stress.*