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CIGNA, Aetna To Ban Workplace Smoking Completely
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The last workplace refuges for smokers are disappearing as a growing number of employers in Connecticut and around the nation adopt the toughest ban yet — no puffing anywhere on company property. Not outdoors, not even in parking areas.

CIGNA said Wednesday that it will start a total smoking ban April 1 for employees and visitors at its 179 properties, including Bloomfield, and Aetna told its workers in July that its complete ban will take effect July 1. Electric Boat in Groton is discussing a possible total ban with its unions.

In addition, the Connecticut Hospital Association began an initiative today coinciding with the American Cancer Society's annual Great American Smokeout to get its 29 member hospitals to make their campuses smoke-free by November 2010.

Employers are cracking down to improve workers' health and productivity, protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke and save on ever-growing health care costs. Although some smokers may think the move is punitive, employers say it's not meant to be, and they're offering incentives to quit.

"This is not about enforcement," said Dr. Jeffrey Kang, CIGNA's chief medical officer. "It's really about focusing on how getting to a smoke-free environment can improve the individual's health, can improve the health of our loved ones ... improve health in society, and then it's about setting a good example or role model for our customers."

About 12 to 14 percent of CIGNA's 3,833 Connecticut employees or their family members still smoke, and the company is hoping it can get at least a third of them to quit based on success at getting customers' workers to kick the habit. CIGNA employees pay \$16 less each pay period, or \$416 a year, for health insurance if they and their covered dependents don't smoke.

The company is offering employees on-site tobacco cessation programs, support groups and full insurance for prescription drugs that help smokers quit.

CIGNA employees who puffed away outside their offices at lunchtime Wednesday seemed resigned to the total ban.

"We have jobs, and with the economy the way it is, you're not going to fight over a cigarette," one employee said.

Another said, "It wouldn't be my first choice, but I'll work with it." However, a nonsmoking CIGNA employee objected to the ban, saying it "might be just a bit too intrusive."

Employers are circumspect about how harshly they might discipline workers who sneak a cigarette after the ban.

"We'll figure that out as we go along," Kang said. "We're going to take each individual case as it comes along."

Ten Connecticut hospitals have adopted total smoking bans, including St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport and the Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford. It helps fulfill their mission of health and improves the hospital environment, said Leslie Gianelli, director of communication for the hospital association.

Besides, she said, "patients wheeling outside with their IVs to smoke, that's not what hospitals want to see."