

northwest

The Results Are In

Bad news can be good data

by Malka Geffen

With tobacco use as the leading cause of preventable disease, Oregon's queer community is in double trouble. According to the most recent survey by Oregon's Adult Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System, 19.9 percent of Oregonians smoke. At Portland Pride 2005, Breathe Free, Oregon's LGBTQ Coalition Against Tobacco surveyed attendees about tobacco use and secondhand smoke. The survey's results, which were released June 2, revealed that 41 percent of the respondents smoke.

The youth and adult volunteers of the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center collected 593 responses. The survey questioned respondents' smoking habits, frequency at bars and opinion about anti-smoking policies. The majority of respondents favored smoke-free entertainment venues, and 76 percent reported that they would go to bars as often or more if the venues were smoke-free.

According to Breathe Free coordinator R.E. Szego, the results of the survey are clear. "Because LGBTQ people smoke at such high rates, we should do all we can to support each other in quitting. Tobacco use in our communities leads to health risks both for those who smoke and for those exposed to secondhand smoke. Having all indoor workplaces go smoke-free, including bars where lots of us work or socialize, would support members of our communities in quitting and breathing clean air."

Thanks to the Breathe Free survey, one more issue facing the queer community is becoming clearer. According to Szego, trans people are at the higher end for risk factors facing the queer community's health. About 41 percent of survey respondents fell into the gender-variant category, which included many responses such as "transgender," "trans," "genderqueer," "depends on the day" and "don't want to answer." "Throwing everyone into a gender-variant category isn't the best answer," says Szego, "but if 17.5 percent identify as not 'male' or 'female,' it's important."

According to Szego, very little research has been done in the trans community around health issues in general. Szego hopes this survey, which will be conducted again at Portland Pride 2006, will provide needed data on risk behavior for prevention work, help identify the link between smok-

ing and homophobia/transphobia and make our community and schools safer. Revisions are being made to this year's survey to help people more easily answer the questions and get better data. Szego hopes that including open-ended questions as well as check boxes about gender and sexual orientation will provide data that are more comparable with other surveys and studies.

So why is the queer community smoking twice as much as the general population in Oregon? In addition to the \$14 billion the tobacco industry spends each year on marketing and promotion, Szego says industry campaigns have specifically targeted the queer community since the early '90s.

"Because of homophobia and transphobia, LGBTQ folks may feel overlooked by the mainstream media and advertising," explains Szego. "When companies do advertise in our communities, we may have a stronger sense of brand loyalty because it seems like they're willing to support us. I think we have to look at what's on the other end of that support. Tobacco companies are targeting us as a market for a product that not only hurts the people who use it but also hurts those around us—our communities and our families. Then they use their profits to back legislators who vote against us."

According to Szego, another important factor is stress. Marginalized by the mainstream, queer people face homophobia, transphobia, harassment and a high risk of violence. Most smokers get hooked in adolescence when smoking becomes a person's learned response to stress. Queer youth face the additional stresses of being kicked out of their homes and missing school because of higher rates of verbal abuse. Once addicted, Szego says, it takes the average smoker up to eight attempts to quit.

"The more people in the LGBTQ community that know and think about this, the more people in the community will get riled up and get behind a smoking ban," says Szego. Oregon is the only state on the West Coast that is not 100 percent smoke-free, and 35,000 Oregonians are still exposed to secondhand smoke at work. According to the Tobacco Free Coalition of Oregon, 18 Oregonians die from tobacco use each day.

The coalition announced the findings of its new study May 31, World No Tobacco Day. American Cancer Society volunteers tested the

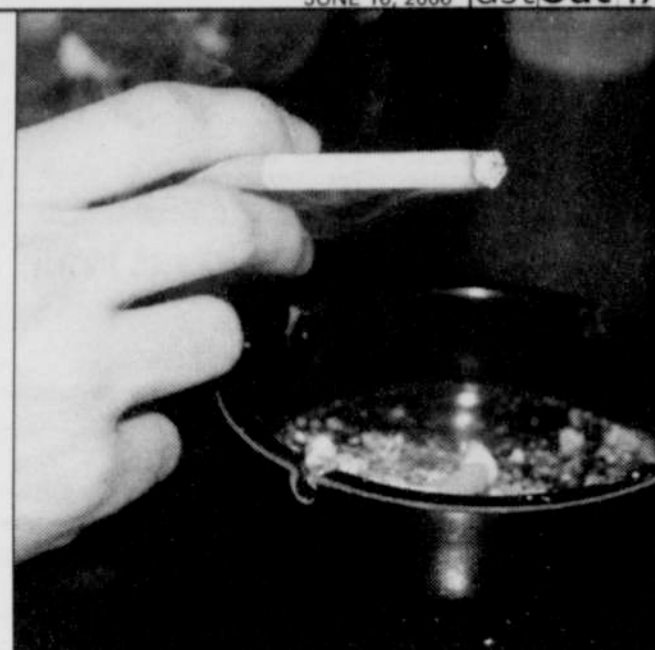
indoor air quality in a random sampling of 47 bars and 60 restaurants in 12 cities in Oregon. They found that the level of indoor air pollution measured was more than six times higher in businesses that allow smoking than in those where smoking is prohibited. Executive director Tabitha Engle says this amount is three times higher than the Environmental Protection Agency considers "unhealthy" for outdoor air. With the deaths of 800 nonsmoking Oregonians every year from secondhand smoke exposure, Engle says now is the time for Oregon to pass a statewide law.

"We need to do what California and Washington did and pass a 100 percent smoke-free workplace law," says Engle. "Breathe Free's survey of one specific population in Oregon shows people are very supportive of a law. We're changing people's minds, and that's very exciting."

What can the queer community do to help itself out of this health risk? Szego has several suggestions. Write letters to the editors of local and regional papers about supporting the ban. Write letters to the editors of magazines that run tobacco ads. Work with organizations such as Breathe Free and the Tobacco Free Coalition of Oregon. Come to Portland Pride 2006 and fill out this year's Breathe Free survey at the SMYRC booth. Talk to the owners of your favorite bars and entertainment venues about going smoke-free. Support venues and events that have already gone smoke-free.

Event producer DJ Puppet is a champion of smoke-free queer parties. "I've found the response to going nonsmoking at my events to be largely positive," she says. "Even smokers such as myself are relieved to not have to drown in clouds of cigarette smoke every time we go out. I also like that my clothes do not need to be incinerated the next day. I've found it helps me as an event producer to cut back on my smoking, which will hopefully lead to my quitting someday." ☺

For more information about BREATHE FREE, OREGON'S LGBTQ COALITION AGAINST TOBACCO contact R.E. Szego at 503-784-5813 or r.e.szego@cascadiabhc.org. You can also visit www.myspace.com/breathefree, breathefree.livejournal.com or www.smyrc.org and click on Tobacco Prevention.



The results are in: Breathe Free's Pride 2005 survey shows double the smoking rate among queer respondents.

Support these fabulously smoke-free events and clubs in June and beyond

- **Total Drag 2006:** 9 p.m. June 16 at Wonder Ballroom, 128 N.E. Russell St. Admission is \$10. www.totaldrag.com.
- **Wild Card presents Let's Get Physical!:** 11 p.m. June 17 at Acme, 1305 S.E. Eighth Ave. Admission is \$5. www.wildcardpdx.com.
- **Meet Dept. presents Trash:** 9 p.m. June 20 at Towne Lounge, 714 S.W. 20th Place. Admission is \$2-\$5. www.meetdept.com.
- **Booty:** 9 p.m. June 22. Check www.bootypdx.com for location. On June 29 the alterna-queer party will move permanently to Acme, 1305 S.E. Eighth Ave. Admission is \$3.
- **Meet Dept. presents Angel Lee:** 9 p.m. June 27 at Towne Lounge, 714 S.W. 20th Place. Admission is \$2-\$5.
- **Sissyboy presents Summer Trilogy Part 1:** 10:30 p.m. June 30 at Holocene, 1001 S.E. Morrison St. Admission is \$5.
- **Vas-o-Line:** 9 p.m. first and third Wednesdays at Red Cap Garage, 1035 S.W. Stark St. Admission is \$3-\$5.
- **Holocene:** The club hosts Gaycation (first Wednesdays), Tart (second Sundays), Double Down (last Saturdays) and Cupcake (fourth Sundays). It has a designated smoking room with an exhaust fan vented to the outside that is separate from the rest of the venue.

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