

Labor & Industries: Safety & Health Committee/Wellness 360° Smoking Survey

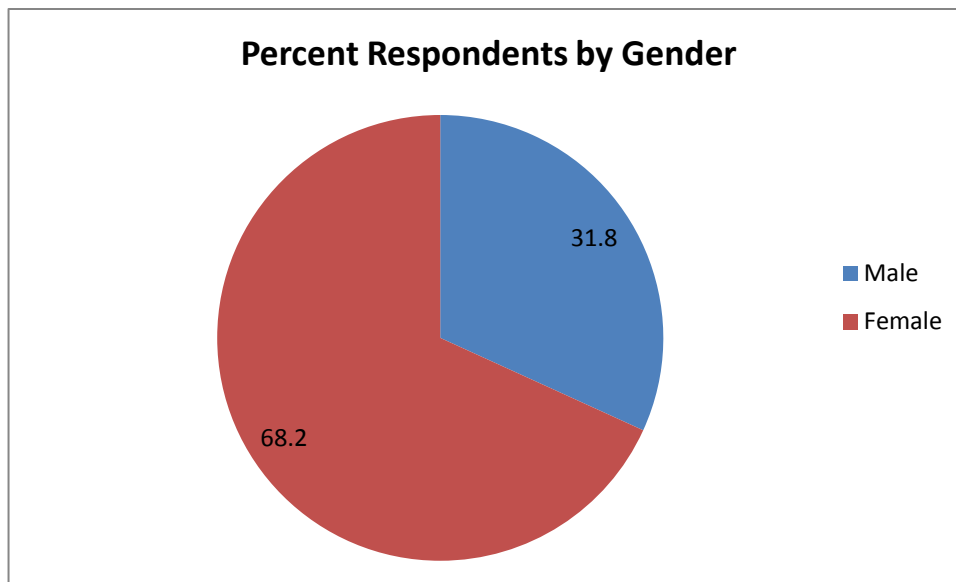
Based on Labor & Industries employee dissatisfaction with the current policy that governs cigarette/tobacco smoking at the Tumwater Headquarters office¹ an online survey to assess support for stronger policy options, and ideas around policies, was distributed to L&I Tumwater Headquarters employees in mid-April to early May 2012.

A total of 1,132 Labor & Industries employees completed the survey between 4/18-5/7/12.

Based on employee counts from January 2012, we estimate 67% of all L&I employees at the Tumwater Headquarters completed the survey.

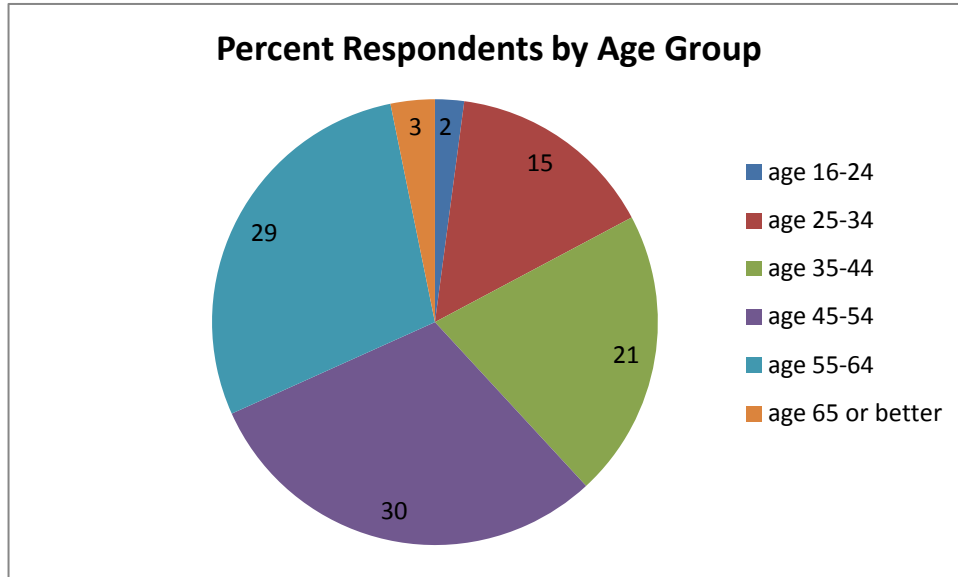
Survey Respondent Demographics

More women than men completed the survey. The employee population at L&I is largely female, but we estimate that the response rate among women employees was higher than for men.



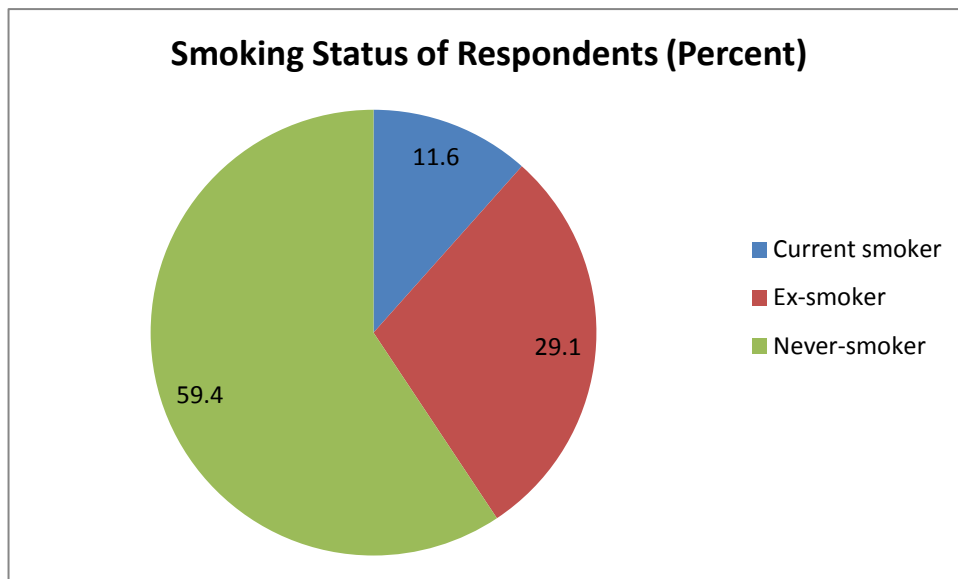
¹ consistent with Washington State law, smoking is banned within 25 feet of doorways and air intake systems

Most respondents were ages 25-64; very few employees who responded were ages 16-24 or 65 and better (this is similar to the actual age distribution of employees and L&I).



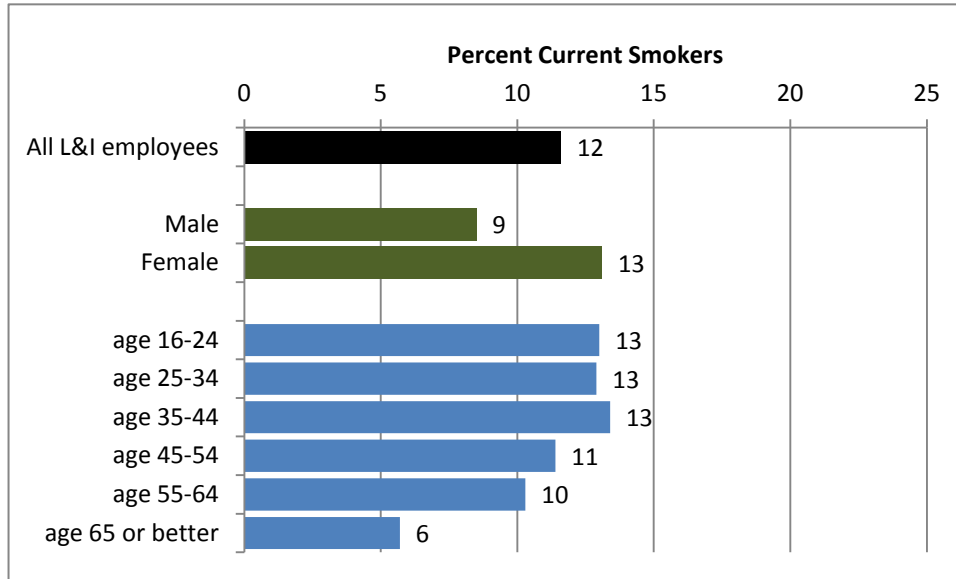
Smoking Status and Interest in Quitting Among L&I Employees

About one in ten (12%) L&I employees reported being a current tobacco smoker. Based on total employee counts, this translates to nearly 200 smokers currently working at Tumwater Headquarters.

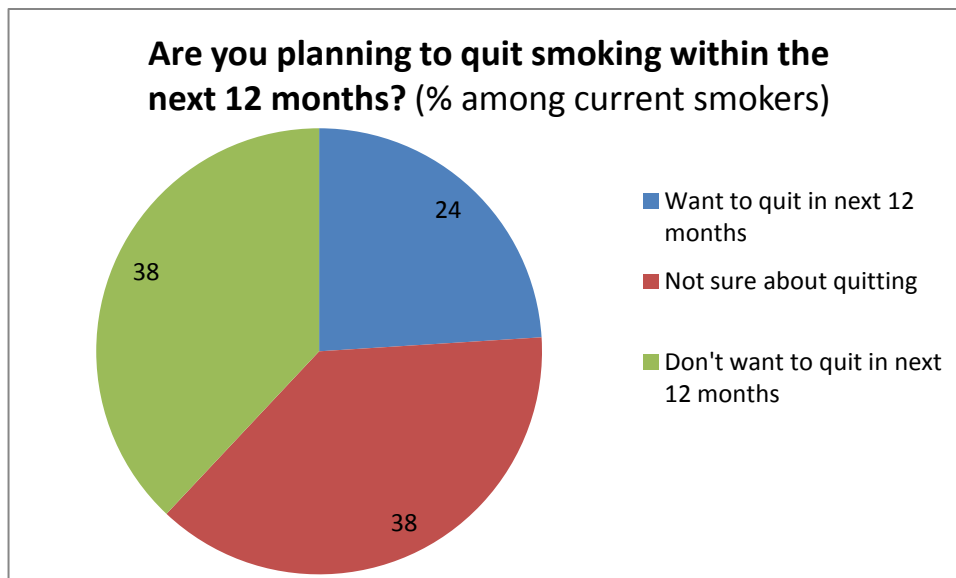


Note: 62 survey respondents (5% of total) responded “prefer not to say.” These respondents were dropped from analysis of smoking questions.

The percent of current smokers was higher among women than men, and among younger employees (16-44) in comparison to older employees (55 or older).



Among the 122 L&I employees who said they were current smokers in the survey, about one in four (24%) said they were planning to quit within the next year. The remainder were evenly split between no planning to quit and not being sure if they would try to quit during the next year.

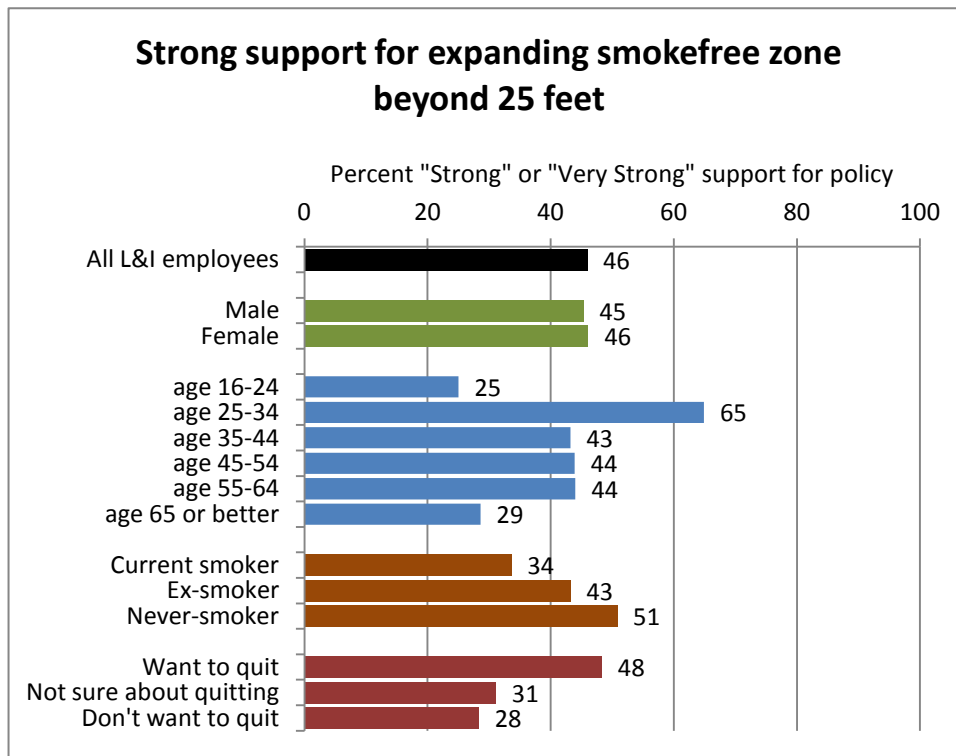


Support for Policy Expanding Smokefree Zone Beyond 25 Feet

Employees were asked about their support for two different policy ideas (independently, not in comparison to each other). The first idea was described as follows:

IDEA #1: Enlarge the current designated non-smoking areas around the perimeter of the building. This means the 25 foot non-smoking areas near entrances (state law) could be expanded to 50 feet or more. 1 = very weak, 5 = very strong.

We categorized employees who scored a “4” or “5” as “strongly supporting” this policy idea. Overall, nearly half of employees supported this policy idea. Support was similar among men and women, and varied somewhat among employees in different age groups. Support was higher among never-smokers than current or ex-smokers; but almost half of current smokers who want to quit in the next year were supportive.



Comments on this policy idea

Employees were offered the opportunity to comment on this policy idea. A total of 433 (38%) of survey respondents made some comments (percentages are among people who had any comments on this question).

- 82 (19%) of comments were positive or supportive
- 79 (18%) of comments were negative or critical
- 272 (63%) of comments were neutral or not related to this policy idea.

Comments were sorted according to multiple themes (percentages are among people who had any comments on this question):

- 132 (30%) commented about being exposed to smoke in front of doors and covered walkways

Though expanding the areas may help keep smoke out of the building it will not fix the second hand smoke that individuals walk through on the covered entryways. Female smoker, 35-44

Now there are no 'safe' entrances to the building for those of us with chronic breathing disorders. i.e. Asthma, Allergies.. Male never-smoker, 45-54

- 72 (17%) were concerned about the weather, including protecting smokers from weather

I am willing to compromise with the non-smokers. If moving 50ft from the entrance way is what it will take to stop the disparaging remarks, then I agree. I just don't want to be standing in the rain, snow and wind. Female smoker, 45-54

To be fair, we do get a lot of rain and most smokers who break the 25 foot rule are trying to escape the weather. Female never-smoker, 25-34

...even designated areas (covered for the weather with say, 'portable carports'. Inexpensive and the cigarettes will stay dry under cover. An example is behind Fred Myers down the road near Costco. It could be placed in the West parking lot where someone leaves a truck and trailer parked for weeks on end. Have that towed away and there is space. Male ex-smoker, 65-70

also.. I think it looks bad to have a bunch of people smoking in the front of our building. Female never-smoker, 35-44

- 53 (12%) were concerned about drifting secondhand smoke

I think the smoke will still drift. It's like walking through an ash tray now. Female never-smoker, 45-54.

- 39 (9%) specifically mentioned wind blowing secondhand smoke, and that the front of L&I's Tumwater building is designed in a way that funnels smoke into doorways

The wind would still blow the smoke into the non-smoking area. And there have been times (early mornings usually) that I can smell smoke while sitting at my desk. I assume that the smoke is being pulled in the ventilation system. Smoking near the building is not a good idea. Never-smoker (gender undetermined), 55-64

The covered walkways along the east and west sides of the building funnel the smoke right to the employee's entrances. The usual southerly winds blows the smoke from where the smokers are sitting or standing in those walkways south directly to the entrances. Female never-smoker, 55-64

- 31 (7%) thought that the Labor & Industries campus should go smokefree entirely

As an agency that is focused on worker health, we should have a smoke-free campus. Male never-smoker, 35-44

I think we should go to a completely smoke free campus like the DSHS buildings down the road. I used to smoke so I know it can be tough, but I believe that non-smokers should not have to breathe the cigarette smoke while coming/going to work. Further, I use the walking path twice a day and people actually smoke & walk on that. If we went to a completely smoke free campus, that would take care of the path smokers as well as the issue around the buildings. I think it gives a poor image to the public on this agency. Female ex-smoker, 35-44

- 28 (6%) commented that the current policy was fine

State law should apply. People are exposed to very minimal second hand smoke when entering/exiting the building & are not in enclosed areas where they are forced to continuous exposure to second hand smoke for prolonged periods of time. Female smoker, 35-44.

The law clearly requires 25 ft, then why expand it now...prior to the law, the agency did not set a policy for designated smoking areas, and the second hand smoke issue has been around as long as the building. The agency should remain neutral on the issue and continue to follow the law. Female smoker, 35-44

- 20 (5%) were concerned about clear rules and enforcement, including comments that the current rule is not enforced.

Too hard to enforce because most people cannot judge distances. Male non-smokers, 65-70

It doesn't really matter because some of these people do not abide by the 25 foot rule, I constantly see people smoking right on the other side of the sign on the pillar that states: "thank you for not smoking in this area." Also you have put a cigarette deposit receptacle right next to the stairs leading up to the entrance! Female never-smoker, 35-44

- 19 (4%) were concerned about the distance taking time to get to

Their breaks would be longer due to increased travel time to and from smoking areas. They may get more disgruntled and less productive in general. Female never-smoker, 25-34

as breaks are only 15 minutes and waiting on elevators takes 4 mins each way I do not want to spend my entire break getting to a smoking area & having to turn around and hurry back or be late and answer to my supervisor constantly for lateness. I personally go out of my way to stay as far away from the building as possible. Female smoker, 35-44

- 11 (3%) were concerned that litter is a problem or could be worsened

When I walk through the walkway on the northeast side of the building I not only smell the smoke, I also have to look at the cigarette butts in the flower beds. Female never-smoker, 55-64

- 7 (2%) were concerned about the money being spent on addressing this policy

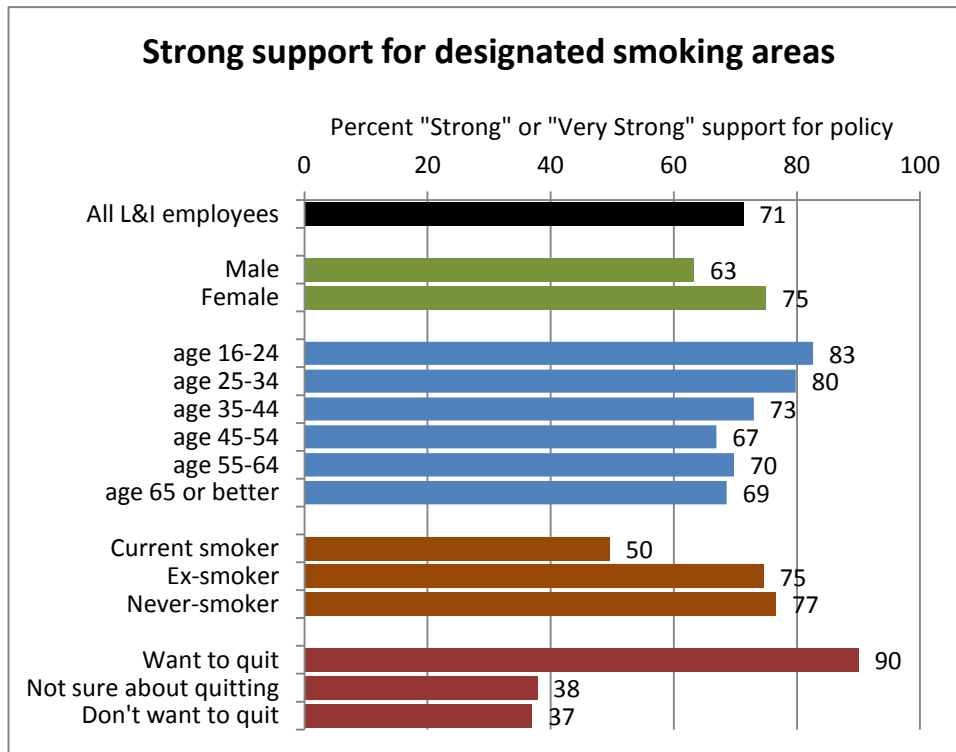
Since I don't smoke, I don't have a "dog in this fight", but if this were to happen, wouldn't the employer be obligated to provide shelter for the smokers to use during inclement weather? How would this be paid for? As a public entity, how would a "smoking shelter" be viewed by the taxpayer? Male never-smoker, 55-64

Support for Policy Designating Smoking Areas

Employees were next asked about a second idea for strengthening the policy, as follows:

IDEA #2: Create designated smoking areas -- exclusive areas on the L&I campus where smoking is permitted. All other areas would be off limits to smoking. There are currently no designated smoking areas on the L&I campus. 1 = very weak, 5 = very strong.

Again, we categorized employees who scored a “4” or “5” as “strongly supporting” this policy idea. Support was higher for this policy idea than for the previous policy idea, both among employees overall (71% support for idea #2 vs. 46% for idea #1), and also among all employee subgroups. Support was somewhat higher among women than men, and among younger people than older people. Of interest, about half of current smokers supported this policy idea, and current smokers who want to quit reported the highest support of any group (90%).



Comments

Employees were asked to provide comments on policy idea #2 if they wanted to. A total of 454 (40%) provided some kind of comment. Percentages below are among people who had any comments on this question:

- 191 (42%) of comments were positive or supportive
- 63 (14%) were negative or critical
- 200 (44%) were neutral or not specific to this policy idea.

Themes of comments included the following (percentages are among people who had any comments):

- 127 (28%) commented about being exposed in front of doors or walkways

Hopefully you can make it somewhere out of the way and not where regular pedestrian traffic has to pass through. Female ex-smoker 45-54

The designated areas should not be close to building entrances and definitely not near the public entrance in the front of the building. Female never-smoker, 55-64

- 76 (17%) were concerned about weather

Maybe you could make a covered/enclosed "gazebo" area removed from the building where smokers could go inside to get away from the weather. Female never-smoker, 55-64.

- 61 (13%) said designated areas needed to be 50 feet or further away from doors

Rather than putting the smoking area on campus 26 feet away from the door, make a designated smoking area that is not as close to the front or back entrance. Male never-smoker, 16-24

- 42 (9%) were concerned about secondhand smoke drift

Walking through the non-smoking area of the property is like swimming in the non-peeing section of the pool - doesn't work! Female ex-smoker, 55-64

- 40 (9%) were concerned about the distance of potential designated smoking areas and the time to get to them or impact on less mobile workers

The only issue I see is that the smokers really do need a covered area. I don't think we have any covered areas in which non-smokers would not also use for building access. Another issue could be location and accessibility for customers. In addition to injured workers and employers who come to the building, there are a fair number of agencies and organizations which hold conferences here. Would they have access to covered space? Female ex-smoker, 45-54

- 27 (6%) thought that the policy should be left as-is

Aren't there designated areas? Aren't the areas marked by the ash trays? Female smoker, 45-54

- 25 (6%) thought the the campus should go entirely smokefree

No matter what someone is still going to inhale second hand smoke on campus unless it is smoke-free. Female non-smoker, 35-44.

- 19 (4%) were concerned about the cost of this policy option

Then we have to ask ourselves if we are going to use tax payer dollars to allow state employees to conduct an activity that kills themselves on tax payer time. Male Ex-smoker, 25-34

- 14 (3%) were concerned about clear rules & enforcement

The only issue I can think of is will everyone abide by the designated area idea? If not, how can it be enforced? Could it become an HR issue? Female ex-smoker, 25-34

I personally am not bothered too much, but I would lean more towards this idea, only because those who are bothered would know to steer clear of this area. Female never-smoker, 45-54

What about the parking lot, employee's personal vehicles, the walking trails, etc.? I don't think it's a good idea. Who is going to enforce it? What will the consequences be? - because if you don't have any, employees won't abide by the designated areas. Female never-smoker, 25-34

Designated areas protect the smokers and non-smokers alike. Male ex-smoker, 55-64.

- 14 (3%) were concerned about wind blowing secondhand smoke
- 6 (1%) said litter may be a problem

Other Policy Ideas

Employees were asked if they had other ideas about policy solutions:

Can you think of other ways to solve the second-hand smoke issue? Please tell us your ideas.

A total of 288 (25%) of employees taking the survey provided some other comments or ideas. Most of these were similar to ideas already expressed in the

survey (percentages are among people who had any comments for this question):

- 191 (42%) said that the entire Labor & Industries campus should be smokefree
- 50 (17%) said that there should be some additional policy alternatives
- 67 (15%) said that there should be a designated smoking area
- 37 (13%) said that the current policy is not a problem
- 32 (11%) said that there should be better air filters or fans to block secondhand smoke in buildings
- 33 (11%) said that smoking should not be allowed near the entrance or walkways
- 30 (7%) said that employees need cessation programs or quit incentives
- 21 (7%) said that there are other smoking issues
- 10 (3%) said that there should be better enforcement of the current policy
- 10 (3%) said that employees should smoke in their cars.

Last, employees were asked if there was anything else they'd like to say (percentages are among people who had any comments):

- 72 said "thank you" for addressing this issue
- 47 said smoke in front of doors/walkways is a problem
- 43 said that they thought the whole L&I campus should be smokefree
- 38 commented that addressing this policy is disrespectful, smokers have rights, or there are other issues of greater importance
- 19 thought that smokers need help to quit – programs, encouragement, help
- 18 commented that they smelled smoke on people in the workplace, in elevators
- 17 said that litter from cigarette butts is a problem

- 14 commented that smokers take longer/extra breaks
- 14 commented that tobacco is a health hazard
- 13 said designate a smoking area
- 7 said make a covered area away from the building
- 2 commented that the distance to the smoking area is an important consideration
- 2 commented that enforcement of any policy is needed.

Conclusion

Interest in the issue of smoking policies at Labor & Industries appears high, judging from the high response rate to this survey and the large proportion of survey respondents who provided comments on the survey.

About one in ten L&I employees who responded to the survey said that they currently smoke. This translates into an estimated 200 employees at Tumwater and 300 employees agency-wide.

Support for the policy idea of designating smoking areas was high (71% among all employees). This idea was received more favorably than simply extending the current 25-foot rule. Half of current smokers (50%) supported the idea of a dedicated smoking area, and 90% of current smokers who are planning to quit.

Regardless of the specific solution, several key themes emerged that merit consideration when comparing policy options:

- Clear rules and procedures for enforcement of the rules (at all times, including fire drills) so that both smokers and non-smokers can reliably avoid the areas that bother them;
- Providing cover, not making smokers stand in the rain (although some expressed concern about spending money on shelters);
- If designating a smoking areas, consideration of diffusion of smoke and wind patterns that may blow smoke toward the building or into doorways (especially funneled into the front doorway) and also walking paths;

- Safety and time requirements for walking/travel to areas where smoking is allowed (either designated areas or off-campus), particularly for disabled or mobility-impaired L&I employees, and also visitors.