



# Rhode Island Beach Smoking Survey Report

June 2013

## Introduction

Rhode Island, known as The Ocean State, attracts an estimated 20 million beach visits each year<sup>1</sup>, (Mazotta et al, 2012). The issue of cigarette smoking in this pristine natural resource has been a controversial one. Secondhand smoke - even outdoors - poses health risks to nonsmokers and toxic cigarette butt litter tarnishes the shoreline and is a hazard for wildlife. Despite these serious issues, smoking on beaches still continues.

In 2007 the Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI), Sierra Club, RI Lung Association, RI Department of Health (HEALTH), and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) surveyed beachgoers to collect information from the public on their opinions about smoking on the state's beaches. A voluntary smoking ban had already been implemented in 2007, but more information was needed to adequately assess the current concerns of RI residents.

A network of organizations, including the Rhode Island Tobacco Control Program and its partners, continues to raise awareness about the need to reduce nonsmokers' exposure to secondhand smoke in outdoor settings and the need to improve outdoor areas throughout the state. While some local municipalities, such as Charlestown, have taken formal steps to pass local-level smoke-free beach ordinances, a voluntary ban is still in effect for state beaches. With

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<sup>1</sup> Beach visit is defined as one person making one beach visit on one day

the purpose of informing future educational initiatives, the Tobacco Control Program re-implemented the 2007 survey to assess beachgoers' opinions about smoking on beaches in 2012.

## Methods

In late August and Early September of 2012 TCP staff administered the surveys to 131 respondents at six Rhode Island state beaches including Fort Adams State Park, Goddard Memorial State Park Beach, Lincoln Woods State Park, Misquamicut State Beach, Pulaski Park Beach, and Scarborough State Beach. The 2012 Rhode Island Beach Smoking Survey included nine questions such as "How bothered are you when you are exposed to cigarette smoke on the beach? How bothered are you when you see cigarette litter? Have you ever been burned by stepping on a cigarette on the beach?" Respondents chose from standardized response options. The complete survey is provided in Appendix A.

To collect beachgoers opinions, staff followed the same method used to administer the 2007 survey. Respondents had to be at least 18 years of age and a Rhode Island resident. On highly populated beaches, the survey administrators walked a straight line down the beach, counting approximately 25 steps, and then asked the closest beachgoer if s/he would be willing to take a brief survey about smoking on Rhode Island state beaches. The survey administrator read each question and response options out loud and recorded the respondent's response. One adjustment was made to the 2012 method of selecting respondents for days when the beaches were less populated. In such cases interviewers surveyed every individual that was willing to participate.

## Findings

One hundred thirty one individuals were surveyed of whom 60% were female, and 40% were male. The majority of interviewees were over the age of thirty-five; Thirteen percent were 18-24, 13% were 25-34, 40% were 35-54, and 34% were 55 and older. Sixty-six percent of individuals either seldom or never have children with them at the beach compared to 34% who always or often have children with them at the beach.

A full 72% of beachgoers were bothered (a lot or some) by cigarette smoke on the beach. A full 90% of respondents were bothered (a lot or some) by seeing cigarette litter on the beach. 83% of respondents were in favor of some kind of smoking restriction on state beaches. Forty seven percent of those surveyed wanted smoking to be allowed in designated areas, while 36% wanted a 100% ban on smoking on beaches, with no designated smoking area.

More than three quarters (77%) of individuals surveyed said they had knowledge about the harm cigarette filters pose to young children, birds and sea creatures. Nearly one in five (19%) of respondents stated they were not very aware of this issue. Sixty one percent(61%) of respondents said that they have knowledge about the amount of time it takes for cigarette filters to degrade. Of the individuals who identified as smokers, 93% stated that they manage their cigarette litter by taking the remains with them. Eight percent (8%) of respondents reported having been burned by stepping on a lit cigarette on the beach.

Table 1. Key Findings from Beach Smoking Survey

	<b>2007</b> (N=220)	<b>2012</b> (N=131)
Respondents who are bothered <i>some</i> or <i>a lot</i> by exposure to <b>cigarette smoke</b> on the beach	67%	72%
Respondents who are bothered <i>some</i> or <i>a lot</i> by <b>cigarette litter</b> on the beach bothered <i>some</i> or <i>a lot</i> by cigarette litter on the beach	92%	89%
Respondents who have been <b>burned</b> by stepping on a cigarette on the beach	9%	8%
Of those who smoke, respondents who manage their own cigarette litter on the beach by taking the cigarette remains with them  * (number of smokers = 30)	88%	93%
Respondents who are in favor of restricting smoking on RI state beaches to a <i>designated smoking area</i>	52%	45%
in favor of <i>prohibiting</i> smoking on RI state beaches	33%	38%
in favor of <i>some kind of smoking restriction</i> on state beaches	85%	83%
Respondents who were <i>somewhat</i> or <i>very</i> aware that cigarette filters can be ingested by young children, birds, and sea creatures	77%	77%
Respondents who were <i>somewhat</i> or <i>very</i> aware that it can take decades for a cigarette butt to degrade	73%	61%
Respondents who <i>often</i> or <i>always</i> have children with them at the beach	57%	37%

## Conclusions

Conducting the 2012 Rhode Island Beach Smoking Survey five years after its 2007 implementation allowed us to capture many similar patterns in terms of reported behaviors and attitudes of RI beachgoers related to smoking on state beaches. Over the last five-years, support toward some kind of smoking restriction on state beaches has remained high. In both years the survey was implemented, respondents were more highly in favor of restricting smoking on beaches with a designated smoking area compared to a complete ban on smoking. Beachgoers continue to be bothered by the sight of cigarette litter on beaches. Each year a similar percentage of beachgoers reported having been burned by stepping on a lit cigarette on the beach. This shows a continued public concern regarding exposure to second hand smoke on beaches and proper disposal of cigarette waste on the beach, and underscores the public's awareness of the real harm that comes from smoking on beaches.

As with all survey research, there are limitations to the data. First, while we attempted to replicate the methods used in 2007, the sample size of the 2012 study is smaller. Two hundred twenty residents were surveyed in 2007 and 131 in 2012. Second, results from the question regarding cleaning up cigarette butt litter should be interpreted with caution. It is likely that respondents underreported their personal behavior of leaving cigarette litter on the beach given the general expectation that society expects us to refrain from littering. Direct observation of cigarette butt cleanup behavior would likely be a better indicator of smokers' actual litter management habits. Finally, as with all intercept-type surveys, the sample is a convenience sample, so it is not possible to say whether the opinions expressed by the respondents are representative of the population of Rhode Islanders who visit RI state beaches.

Next Steps: Continuing to educate the public about smoke-free beaches and other outdoor spaces such as parks and recreation areas

Currently, in a joint agreement between the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the State of Rhode Island has a voluntary policy banning smoking on state-run beaches and in state parks. The results from the survey provide valuable information for environmentalists, public health advocates, decision makers, and communities which support the banning of smoking on beaches. Beachgoers want to protect themselves and their families from the dangers associated with cigarette smoking on beaches. Environmentalists and health advocates agree that cigarette litter is harmful to children, adults, and animals. Communities may decide to use the data contained in this report to support local-level ordinances officially banning smoking on their community's beaches. As of June, 2013, the community of Charlestown has taken such a step and officially prohibits smoking on its community parks, beaches, and recreation areas. Other communities have also recently passed local ordinances protecting children and families from second hand smoke by banning smoking in parks and in recreational areas, as seen by such ordinances in the cities of Central Falls (October, 2012) and Woonsocket (May, 2013).

## References:

Marks, E. & Lewis, J. (2007). Rhode Island beach smoking: Report. Smithfield, RI: Audubon Society of Rhode Island.

Mazzotta, M., Latimer, J., Zhukavets, M. (2012). A fact sheet on the importance of Rhode Island beaches. Retrieved on November 1, 2012 from [http://www.watershedcounts.org/documents/RI\\_Beaches\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_051412.pdf](http://www.watershedcounts.org/documents/RI_Beaches_Fact_Sheet_051412.pdf)

## Acknowledgements

This brief was prepared by Alexandra Camara, TCP Intern, Erica Collins, MS, TCP Media Coordinator, and Cynthia Roberts, PhD, TCP Program Evaluator. We would like to thank the Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI), Sierra Club, RI Lung Association, RI Department of Health (HEALTH) and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) for the efforts put in to producing the 2007 survey and report. To obtain the Rhode Island Beach Smoking Survey Report prepared by Eugenia Marks and July Lewis of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, or for any further questions or comments about the 2013 report, please contact Ms. Erica Collins at 401-222-7653.

## Appendix A: Survey Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender of Interviewee

M  F

Beach Location: \_\_\_\_\_

1. **How bothered are you when you are exposed to cigarette smoke on the beach?**

A lot  Some  Only a little  Not at all  Don't know [ Refused]

2. **How bothered are you when you see cigarette litter on the beach?**

A lot  Some  Only a little  Not at all  Don't know [ Refused]

3. **Have you ever been burned by stepping on a cigarette on the beach?**

Yes  No  Don't know [ Refused]

4. **If you smoke, do you manage your cigarette litter, taking the remains with you?**

Yes  No  I don't smoke  Don't know [ Refused]

5. **Should smoking on RI state beaches be...:**

Allowed without restriction  Permitted only in designated areas

Not be allowed at all  Don't know [ Refused]

6. **Is your age between:**

18-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55-64  65+ ?

Don't know [ Refused]

7. **How aware are you that cigarette filters can be ingested by young children, birds, and sea creatures, which can cause sickness and even death?**

Very aware  Somewhat aware  Not very aware [ Refused]

8. **How aware are you that cigarette filters can take decades to degrade?**

Very aware  Somewhat aware  Not very aware [ Refused]

9. **How often do you have children with you at the beach?**

Always  Often  Seldom  Never



**Thank you very much for taking time to answer these questions.**