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Study: Omaha's workplace smoking ban improves air quality BY RICK RUGGLES WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The air quality in 13 bars and keno places improved dramatically after the city's workplace smoking ban went into effect last year, according to study results released by a local anti-smoking group.

The Metro Omaha Tobacco Action Coalition, a group of organizations and people involved in health-related concerns, released the results of the study this morning.

The group determined that before the ordinance, employees in the eight bars and five keno spots breathed air pollution 5.7 times higher than safe levels set by the Environmental Protection Agency. After the ordinance went into effect last year, the fine particle air pollution dropped 98 percent, the coalition said.

The New York-based Roswell Park Cancer Institute conducted the air-quality tests.

Dr. Syed Mohiuddin, chairman of the Creighton University Department of Medicine, said the U.S. surgeon general warned of the hazards of second-hand smoke several years ago.

Mohiuddin spoke at the coalition's news conference at Petrow's Restaurant.

"I don't think we would be surprised by these results," Mohiuddin said of the study's findings.

Although Petrow's was not among the establishments where air quality was tested, Nick Petrow described his establishment's experience in going completely smoke-free in spring 2006, before the City of Omaha enacted the ordinance. He said he had had smoking and nonsmoking areas but banned smoking entirely three years ago.

Petrow said he initially had a 5 percent dip in business, but that decline disappeared within a few weeks. Ultimately, he said, business increased about 5 percent. He said customers viewed his restaurant as more family-friendly after it went smoke-free.