

How To Tips:

Wisconsin Worksites Provide Healthier Vending

Background

Cancer rates in Wisconsin continue to be a major health concern. The Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan estimated that 26,000 people were diagnosed with cancer in 2003, and unhealthy diets and lack of physical activity account for 1/3 of all cancer deaths. In 2000, the Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factor Survey found only 22% of Wisconsinites ate their recommended level of 5 fruits and vegetables per day. Five years later, the level remained the same. We must do more if we want to prevent cancer.

Why target worksite vending machines?

Both community members and researchers agree that our social environment strongly influences what people eat, something like, “you are *where* you eat”! This is because a person’s environment so strongly determines what is available and what is affordable. Seventy percent of the population spends time at a worksite, and most eat at least one meal at work. At a work setting, vending machines are one of the few, sometimes only, sources for food or snacks. Thus, focusing on increasing healthier options in vending is a policy change that can make a big difference for a large group of people, compared to one-on-one education or one-time events.

In the spring of 2006, the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity Program

(NPA) received funds from the Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Program to conduct worksite wellness projects for cancer prevention. The projects, which received small start up grants to get them off the ground, required local health departments to partner with local worksites to

use the Worksite Wellness Resource Kit, which provides step by step instructions on how to create a comprehensive worksite wellness program.

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/index.htm>

We talked to three Wisconsin worksites that improved the vending options they offer their employees, including a mid-sized county health department, a technical college and a small, rural manufacturing plant. We are sharing some of their “How to Tips” with this mini-case study.

Who brings it to the table?

In order to make a change, the issue of vending machine choices needs to be brought to the decision-making table. An “environmental audit” (which is a process for reviewing the overall policies and practices in a worksite) helped to bring this issue to the forefront in two sites. One site conducted a formal audit, using a checklist from the Resource Kit that included a comprehensive assessment which was then reviewed by a wellness committee. The other site used a more informal process, whereby two of the decision-makers from human

Unhealthy diets and lack of physical activity are estimated to account for 1/3 of all cancer deaths...Nearly 80% of Wisconsin’s adults do not eat the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables.

Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan 2005-2010

resources conducted their own “walkaround” audit. Their quick scan of the items in vending machines showed a need for change. In the third site, a wellness committee brought out the issue in their discussions of supporting people watching their weight.

What drives the change?

For these worksites, the *‘time was right’*. They reached immediate consensus among the decision makers that the change was important and moved forward quickly to take action. One summarized the decision as riding on a “wave of wellness”.

Concern over rising health care costs, and recognition that the choices available to employees through vending contributed to poor diets, were common ground for making this a priority in these worksites.

“I feel we are in a ‘wave of wellness’ environment. The vendor was open to changes and knew vending would still be profitable based on their previous experience with schools. Health care costs are major issue for our executive management. Purchasing was aware of issue and on-board for making the change.” HR manager

Despite these commonalities, there were other driving forces experienced at each site. At two of the three sites, an active wellness committee pursued this change and nursed it along. Two sites also had strong advocates within the human resources/personnel department, and the third site had active support from the company president, which helped create momentum for the change to happen quickly.

What did they change?

One site chose a relatively simple change, because their vendor already had an option to increase healthier items by increments of 20%. The management group worked with the vendor to move up to the next level of 40%. Another site involved employees in choosing snacks by holding a vendor

sponsored “taste test” to vote on the top 5 preferences. They ultimately increased healthier choices from 1 to 10 in the snack machine, and from 0 to 12 in the cold machine for employees. Later, they expanded to the front lobby; 4 out of 9 healthier beverages are now available.

The third site made changes and then promoted them in multiple venues. Data collected over a 6-month “pilot” period assessed the success of the individual items: baked snacks tripled in sales, plus juices and fruit were selling better

than the vendor expected. Caffeine free soda was not selling, but the wellness committee decided that they wanted to keep a non-caffeine item. The company president asked the vendor to restock this

item, and reiterated that vending should meet wellness committee standards, not just profit or usage standards. This site also included an approach which has been proven effective at increasing healthy choices --financial incentives. They dropped the price of fruit or baked snacks by 25¢ during a given week, and also gave out door prizes with random healthy items.

How does the change happen?

In two sites, a wellness committee prioritized the issue; in the third, a small administrative group made the decision.

At all of the sites, the vendor played a key role in helping to develop and implement the changes.

Company advocate guides the change. In all sites, after the decision was made, an individual member coordinated and

moved the process of vending machine change forward. The nutritionist at the health department, the Executive Assistant to the VP at the manufacturing site and the HR Department at the technical college played this key role in coordinating the change.

signage was not correct, and asked the vendor to make sure that they paid attention to this during restocking. Another site actually set a formal 6-month testing period to work closely with the vendor to see what was selling and what wasn't.

All sites received top administrative support to move ahead with the vending changes. The coordinator maintained

One site made a strong distinction between the policy decision and the implementation phase. They worked hard to get 'buy in' from the group that received the vending sales, which are used to purchase items to commemorate employee/family events.

In two cases, the companies were very directive in the decision making. At the site which found that caffeine free soda was no longer

communication with the vendor and brought issues back to the wellness committee/administrators.

being stocked, the company president intervened with the vendor to emphasize that this was a requirement not a suggestion. Another worksite actually rewrote the vending contract to insure that 40% of items would continue to be healthier choices.

Working with the vendor. The first step at all sites was to work with the vendor to determine the new items to be offered. In all sites, vendors were prepared --they had nutrition information and signage, and helped make the changes much easier by being well-informed and helpful. One vendor provided special nutritional information notebooks for the employee break-room, another paid for and organized a taste testing for employees to choose healthy items, and another had a set formula offering healthier items in 20% increments, going from 0% to 100%.

Getting employees on board. Two of the sites used promotions to help raise awareness and build "buy-in" for making the change. One site which focused on wellness at all levels of the company, made the vending changes part of a larger nutrition emphasis, with nutrition information in the company newsletter, Healthy Snack Days each month, and sharing "overabundance" of garden produce and weight challenges throughout the year. Another site made a strong distinction between the policy decision and the implementation phase. They knew they had to get "buy in" from the group that received the vending funds, which are used to purchase items to commemorate employee and family events. The coordinator had "multiple conversations" to make the case that it was a win-win -- with a joint effort they could continue to get revenue, plus improve nutrition for employees.

Monitor the vending changes. A proactive relationship was key, as the vendor in all cases proved helpful (provided lists of items and signage). But, the vendor also can let things fall back to the "status quo" if not supervised. For example, vendors continuously monitor items as to whether or not they are selling, and can make changes based on profitability and movement without worksite approval. Thus, worksites monitored the items in the machines. One site noted that the

How long does it take?

In these three sites, the timeline ranged from 3 -10 months. It was accomplished most quickly at the one site where the decision focused solely on changing and labeling items, and was made primarily by



Teresa Ellis, Human Resources Assistant and Richard O'Sullivan, Vice President of Human Resources, initiated healthy vending changes at the Mid-State Technical College

administrators with a vendor that was helpful and prepared. At this site, the issue was brought to the table in October and they worked with their vendor in November. They decided to make the changes from 20% to 40% healthier options at the beginning of the year since this would correspond with the "New Year's Resolution" interest in healthier eating.

At the two other sites, they spent more time 1) preparing for the change, 2) involving other staff and/or 3) promoting healthier options. The site which formally piloted products for 6 months took the longest.

2008 follow-up note: One year later, the healthier vending choices are selling out at one site and they've had to increase the vending slots for them!

Are there potential roadblocks?

Lack of Top Management Support. One partner in a local coalition was unable to get her own worksite to address vending because they could not get top management buy-in. Her strategy was to "sow a few seeds" by continuing to raise awareness, providing data to back up the importance of the change and

bringing the issue back to the table at a later date.

Are there keys to success?

-Find your champions. Work with top decision makers to find those who will advocate for and support your efforts.

-Follow the money. Make sure that you know where the vending money goes! You don't want to be surprised with

opposition before you even get started.

-Use the power you have with your vendor relationship. Vendors are living in a time of change, and as one site pointed out, they are working to "stay in the game". Get as much as you can out of the relationship, such as taste tests, signage, nutrition information, etc.

-Communication. Use the opportunity as a "teachable moment" to educate employees about the health benefits.

-Financial incentives. Charging less for healthier items is a proven strategy to increase choices of healthier items.

Want to know more?

French SA, Jeffery RW, Story M, Breitlow KK, Baxter JS, Hannah P, Snyder MP (2001). Pricing and promotion effects on low-fat vending snack purchases: The CHIPS study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(1), 112-117.

Fiske and Weber Cullen (2004). Effects of promotional materials on vending machines sales of low-fat items in teachers' lounges. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 104(1), 90-93(4).

For more information on the Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan, and to find other groups working on prevention, visit www.wicancer.org

To download the *Worksite Wellness Toolkit*, visit the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity Program: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/index.htm> or contact Jon Morgan at 608-266-9781 or jonathon.morgan@wi.gov