



Published in final edited form as:

*Health Promot Pract.* 2013 November ; 14(6): 901–908. doi:10.1177/1524839913476300.

## Newspaper Coverage of Implementation of the Michigan Smoke-Free Law: Lessons Learned

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### Abstract

**Objective**—To examine whether newspaper coverage of the Michigan smoke-free law was favorable or hostile, contained positive messages that had been disseminated by public health groups, contained negative messages, and differed across regions.

**Method**—Articles about the smoke-free law in print or online editions of Michigan newspapers the month immediately before and after the law took effect were identified and were coded for tone, positive messages contained in media outreach materials, and negative messages commonly disseminated by smoke-free law opponents.

**Results**—A total of 303 print and online articles were identified; the majority were coded as “both positive and negative” (34%) or “mainly positive” in tone (32%). Of 303 articles, 75% contained at least one pro-law message and 56% contained at least one anti-law message. The most common pro-law messages were information about enforcement of the law (52%) and the benefits of smoke-free air (48%); the most common anti-law messages were about potential negative economic impact (36%), government intrusion/overreach (31%), and difficulties with enforcement (28%).

**Conclusions**—Public health departments and partners play an important role in implementation of smoke-free laws by providing the public, businesses, and other stakeholders with clear and accurate rationale, provisions, and impacts of these policies.

### Keywords

smoke-free law; media analysis; technical assistance; tobacco control; media evaluation; tobacco control programs; policy implementation; secondhand smoke exposure; Michigan; clean indoor-air ordinances

## INTRODUCTION

The state of Michigan enacted a statewide smoke-free law on December 18, 2009, after 12 years of state and local efforts to educate the public about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke and the benefits of smoke-free laws. The Dr. Ron Davis Smoke Free Air Law, which went into effect on May 1, 2010, makes almost all indoor public places and workplaces, including restaurants and bars, smoke-free. The law contains exemptions for tobacco specialty shops, cigar bars, and gaming floors of casinos. Since its passage, several bills have been introduced to weaken its provisions, but none of these measures have succeeded.

To assist in implementing the law, the state health department and partner organizations conducted educational outreach to local organizations, businesses, and news media outlets. News media coverage of public health issues, including tobacco control, has a powerful influence on the public's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Brodie, Hamel, Altman, Blendon, & Benson, 2003; Chapman, 2007; National Cancer Institute, 2008; Wallack, Woodruff, Dorfman, & Diaz, 1999; Warner, 1977). The coverage exerts this influence both directly, by itself changing individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, and indirectly, by contributing to the adoption of policies that affect these outcomes (Asbridge, 2004; National Cancer Institute, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Warner, 1977). News media outreach activities carried out by national, state, and local public health programs, coalitions, and advocacy organizations can generate increased coverage of health topics and can influence the prominence, content, and tone of this coverage (Mebane, Temin, & Parvanta, 2003; National Cancer Institute, 2008; Pederson et al., 2012; Stillman, Cronin, Evans, & Ulasevich, 2001).

Research has consistently found that the news media are a major source of health information for the public and that news coverage plays an important role in calling attention to and framing health issues, including policy issues, for the public and the policy makers (National Cancer Institute, 2008). Tobacco control issues typically generate substantial news coverage, with articles on secondhand smoke and smoke-free policies often accounting for a significant portion of this coverage (Durrant, Wakefield, McLeod, Smith, & Chapman, 2003; Long, Slater, & Lysengen, 2006; National Cancer Institute, 2008; Nelson et al., 2007; Pederson et al, 2012; Smith, Terry-McElrath, Wakefield, & Durrant, 2005; Smith & Wakefield, 2004; Smith, Wakefield, & Edsall, 2006). Most of these studies have focused on newspaper coverage rather than other forms of media, probably because of the accessibility of newspapers to researchers.

As part of a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the Michigan smoke-free law, health partners in Michigan sought to evaluate efforts to educate businesses and the public about the law. This evaluation examined print and online newspaper articles that appeared from 1 month before to 1 month after the law's implementation. This time frame was selected for several reasons. First, news media coverage of smoke-free laws is typically especially intense during the period between when they are adopted and when they take effect and during the period immediately after they take effect. Second, smoke-free laws may still be vulnerable to opposition efforts to rescind or weaken these laws during these periods, so it is important for accurate news media coverage to offset inaccurate coverage.

Finally, if information about the rationale for and provisions of a smoke-free law is not communicated clearly, awareness of and compliance with the law may be problematic; thus, effective communication of accurate information through the news media is critical (International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

## BACKGROUND

Efforts to enact smoke-free policies in Michigan began in 1997 with the passage of Michigan's first local smoke-free ordinance in Marquette, which banned smoking in private work sites, including bars and restaurants. The city was sued by several local restaurants, which challenged the legality of the ordinance. The lawsuit ultimately led to a 2001 ruling by the Michigan Court of Appeals that local jurisdictions were preempted from imposing smoking restrictions on food service establishments that went beyond state law, which at the time required designated smoking areas (Smoke-Free Environments Law Project, 2001).

Despite this setback, Michigan communities continued to pursue smoke-free work site ordinances. Between 2001 and 2009, a total of 27 additional local jurisdictions passed laws prohibiting smoking in work sites, excluding bars and restaurants (Michigan Department of Community Health [MDCH] Tobacco Section, 2009). Community coalitions helped encourage passage of local ordinances by educating residents, local and state decision makers, news media, and business owners about the health effects of secondhand smoke and about effective approaches for protecting nonsmokers. Specifically, they used strategies such as community and business presentations, direct communication with local decision makers, testimony at public hearings and other venues, some paid media, and a large amount of earned media. Efforts were made to use consistent messaging across communities and channels to help ensure a high level of awareness and compliance with local laws. Between 1997 and 2009, only six citations were issued by local governments for violations (personal communication with MDCH Tobacco Section, 2010), with internal data indicating that the low number of citations was a result of good compliance rather than a lack of enforcement.

As the number of local smoke-free laws increased, public health groups and several state legislators accelerated efforts toward a statewide smoke-free law. In February 2005, the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, and American Lung Association formed the Michigan Campaign for Smokefree Air. This organized statewide campaign worked together with the state tobacco prevention coalition, Tobacco-Free Michigan, grassroots advocates, partner organizations, and supportive legislators to pursue adoption of comprehensive state smoke-free legislation.

Meanwhile, local and state coalitions continued to educate the public on the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure. Tools used to garner earned and paid media were revised and updated as needed. These tools included talking points, sample letters to the editor, sample op-eds, news release templates (i.e., "Swiss cheese" press releases), and public service announcements. Following the passage of the statewide law in 2009, public health partners continued to collaborate, and revised their tools to reflect the specific provisions of Michigan's law, including implementation and enforcement provisions, and the effective

date. Partners worked together to provide technical assistance to local contractors (e.g., local health departments) in order to facilitate utilization of tools and messages. This included seven regional trainings, trainings held during Tobacco-Free Michigan quarterly membership meetings, and open forums for state government departments, local health departments, a regional business alliance, the Michigan Liquor Control Commission, the Michigan Restaurant Association, the Small Business Association of Michigan, and other state-level groups. These forums were intended to educate these stakeholders and to encourage them to use consistent messaging when communicating with the public, the news media, and their constituents. Six press releases covered topics such as MDCH smoke-free law website, implementation date, availability of FAQs, and the law's implementation and success. Outreach to the public came in several forms. Thirteen community presentations in February and March 2010 educated medium to large groups about the law and encouraged participants to write letters the editor, and some received media coverage from earned media activities locally. Culturally appropriate print ads about the law were created in English, Spanish, Arabic, and Cantonese, and a television ad called "smoked lasagna" was aired during April 2010. All this outreach communicated the benefits and importance of the law.

## METHOD

### Development of Objectives and Variable Description Manual

The analysis was designed to examine the extent to which newspaper coverage of the Michigan smoke-free law (a) was favorable or hostile to the law in tone and whether differences in tone were observed by region, (b) contained positive messages about the law that were included in media materials disseminated by the MDCH and the American Cancer Society, and (c) contained negative messages about the law that may have been disseminated by opponents of the law.

To assess whether newspaper coverage of the law was favorable, tone was operationalized as follows. Direct or paraphrased quotes and the types of organizations cited were highlighted with different colors according to the tenor of language or content as it relates to the law (i.e., positive, negative, neutral). The relative proportion of positive and negative content in each article was estimated and characterized as "mainly positive," "mainly negative," "both positive and negative," "neutral/factual," "indeterminate," or "not applicable." For example, an article in which well more than half of content was highlighted as positive was considered "mainly positive." To determine whether the tone of newspaper coverage varied across the state, we compared tone across regions. The location of the newspaper was categorized by the health regions used by the MDCH (see Table 1).

To assess whether positive messages about the state law disseminated by partners were represented in newspaper articles, sample media (see Table 2) were compiled and coded for content by one rater. Table 2 describes these tools, their mode of dissemination, and their intended audience and identifies the tools that were included and excluded in the content analysis. Themes were identified and defined in detail; they included worker protection, benefits of smoke-free air/health effects of secondhand smoke, positive economic impact of smoke-free laws in general and of the Michigan law in particular, and information about law enforcement (e.g., description and roles of enforcing agencies, violation reporting, self-

enforcing nature of laws, signage requirements). The resulting themes were used to create the *Variable Description Manual and Codebook*, which in turn was used to code each article.

To assess whether negative messages commonly disseminated by opponents of such laws were included in newspaper articles, we identified previous studies of opposition messaging around smoke-free laws (Menashe & Siegel, 1998; Tsoukalas & Glantz, 2003) and used the findings to develop a list of common opposition themes and coding scheme. Opposition messages included smokers' rights/individual choice, government intrusion/overreach, negative economic impact, and perceptions that the law was unenforceable or was an unfunded state mandate.

Other pro- and anti-law messages not considered main messages were also collected and analyzed. Only themes mentioned more than twice are discussed in this article.

### Search Strategy

Because of time and financial constraints, only Michigan print and online news articles were included. We examined news articles appearing during the month immediately before and the month immediately after the law took effect (i.e., from April 1, 2010, to June 1, 2010).

Newspaper articles were obtained in several ways. First, searches were conducted using the LexisNexis® Publisher electronic database and Cision® Print Media Monitoring. An initial comparison found little overlap between these two sources. The search was supplemented with a daily digest of statewide newspaper coverage collected by the Michigan Campaign for Smokefree Air, as well as local newspaper articles collected by MDCH community contractors. The latter articles captured many newspaper articles that were not captured by the primary search strategies, including articles from several regions for which these searches identified almost no articles. Exact copies of the same article published in the same newspaper that appeared in more than one search engine were considered duplicates and excluded. Exact copies of the same article that were published in different newspapers were coded separately to accurately reflect geographic distribution of the articles. Types of newspaper coverage included news stories, editorials, opinion columns, and guest commentaries.

### Data Analysis

All data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. All articles were coded by one individual, and a random sample of 10% of articles ( $n = 30$ ) was coded by an additional rater to assess interrater reliability. Disagreements in coding were used to refine the coding manuals. Kappa scores were calculated for the main variables of interest (i.e., four pro-law messages, four anti-law messages, and tone). Unweighted kappa scores were calculated by hand, and kappa scores with linear weights were obtained using an online kappa calculator (Lowry, 2010). Kappa scores ranged from .65 to 1.0.

## RESULTS

### Number and Type of Articles

A total of 303 print and online newspaper articles on the Michigan smoke-free law were identified and coded. These articles, which appeared in 65 print and online newspapers throughout the state, included 254 (84%) news stories; 45 (15%) editorials, opinion columns, or guest commentaries; and 4 (1%) articles that were coded as having elements of news articles and editorials or opinion. Of 303 articles, 74 (24%) appeared in print, 164 (54%) appeared online, 26 (9%) appeared in both formats, and 39 (13%) were “indeterminate” because the search engine did not indicate whether the article was print or online.

### Date and Location of Articles

The majority of articles ( $n = 219$ ; 72%) were published before the state smoke-free law took effect on May 1. Heavy coverage of the law occurred immediately before, on, and soon after this date. News outlets were classified as belonging to one of six regions or a statewide category (data not shown). Michigan’s heavily populated southeast region accounted for the largest percentage of articles ( $n = 107$ ; 35%) of any single region. The lowest percentage of articles came from the Upper Peninsula region ( $n = 18$ ; 6%), followed by the Mid-Michigan ( $n = 22$ ; 7%), Northern ( $n = 23$ ; 8%), Thumb ( $n = 45$ ; 15%), and Western ( $n = 47$ ; 16%) regions. Additionally, 41 articles (14%) appeared in statewide newspapers, with all these articles appearing online.

### Tone and Messaging Content Analysis

The majority of articles were coded as “both positive and negative” (34%) or “mainly positive” (32%) in tone, followed by “neutral/factual” (17%) “mainly negative” (12%), “NA” (not applicable; 4%), and “indeterminate” (1%). Though not tested statistically, a higher percentage of “mainly positive” coverage appeared in May (37%;  $N = 31$  out of 84 total) than in April (29%;  $N = 64$  out of 219 total), and a slightly higher percentage of “mainly negative” coverage appeared in April (12%;  $N = 27$  out of 219 total) than in May (8%;  $N = 7$  out of 84 total). The Upper Peninsula, Western, and Thumb regions generated “mainly positive” coverage overall. All other regions generated “both positive and negative” coverage. Editorials were overwhelmingly “mainly positive,” whereas tone of news articles was distributed across the scale.

Of 303 articles, 227 (75%) contained at least one pro-law message and 168 (55%) contained at least one anti-law message. The most common pro-law messages were information about enforcement (52%) and benefits of smoke-free air/health effects of secondhand smoke (48%), followed by positive economic impact (30%) and worker protection (21%). Among the opposition messages, negative economic impact (36%), government intrusion/overreach (31%), and enforcement/unfunded mandate (28%) were the most common, followed by smokers’ rights/individual choice (20%).

## Secondary Qualitative Analysis

By far the most common pro-law theme that was not a main message was that the law would encourage smokers to try to quit smoking and help them succeed in doing so. Other common positive themes included the following: cost savings to businesses, the law having a neutral economic impact, public support for the law, businesses going smoke-free voluntarily in advance of the law, advantages of the law from the perspective of personal convenience or comfort, and ease of enforcement. Negative themes included claims that the law was unclear, claims that the law was unfair in terms of the venues it included and exempted, the perception that smoking and drinking go hand in hand, concerns about cigarette butt litter outside businesses and customers leaving without paying, and claims that the law was ineffective or unnecessary and that government was being hypocritical by not allowing the use of a legal product while also taxing smokers to raise revenues.

## DISCUSSION

This analysis of newspaper coverage of the Michigan smoke-free law found more positive than negative coverage, and tone of newspaper coverage was also similar across the state. Additionally, three fourths of the articles contained at least one positive message about the state law that appeared in communication materials. Specifically, disseminated messages about enforcement and about the benefits of smoke-free air each appeared in approximately half of the articles, whereas messages about the economic impact of the law and the law as a worker protection measure appeared less frequently. In contrast, negative messages about the law commonly disseminated by opposition groups appeared in just more than half the articles. Interestingly, the number of messages around enforcement issues that were favorable to the law greatly exceeded the number of messages on this topic that were unfavorable to the law, suggesting that public health groups' communication efforts may have effectively blunted any negative messaging on this topic.

Research on news media coverage of smoke-free laws has found that the public debate that occurs when adoption of such laws is being considered typically generates substantial news coverage, including not only hard news stories but also editorials, commentaries, and letters to the editor (Champion & Chapman, 2005; Magzamen, Charlesworth, & Glantz, 2001; National Cancer Institute, 2008). This coverage often reflects a standard series of arguments for and against the proposed policies advanced by proponents and opponents of these policies (Champion & Chapman, 2005; Magzamen et al., 2001; National Cancer Institute, 2008). These arguments are similar to the pro- and anti-law messages identified in this study. Similar to these findings, advocates on both sides of the issue typically succeed in generating news coverage and in having news articles convey their views and claims, although public health advocates usually succeed in generating sufficient coverage favorable to the proposed policy to outweigh or at least offset unfavorable coverage (Champion & Chapman, 2005; Magzamen et al., 2001; National Cancer Institute, 2008).

Finally, a handful of studies have examined the effectiveness of news media outreach efforts by public health groups and medical journals (De Semir, Ribas, Reveulta, 1998; Mebane et al., 2003; Pederson et al., 2012; Stillman et al., 2001; Stryker, 2002). These studies have suggested that such efforts may increase the news media's coverage of issues and

publications, the prominence of the resulting coverage, and the news media's pickup of specific messages regarding these issues and publications. This study adds to this body of research by suggesting that the specific messages in the outreach more commonly appeared than other opinions or information relevant to the law.

This study has several limitations. Like many previous studies of news coverage of tobacco issues, it was limited to newspaper coverage. However, we included both print and online newspapers because of the availability of news online. Second, this analysis cannot definitively link the dissemination of messages by public health groups to their appearance in newspaper articles. However, the efforts of state and local agencies to educate businesses via direct presentations and media dissemination were extensive, and the coding of the messages was defined very specifically by the content analysis of the media materials used in disseminated tools. Moreover, positive messages about enforcement were the most commonly cited messages, and these were specific to Michigan's law. However, we cannot rule out the possibility of the influence of national media and/or general knowledge about the messages most commonly cited, rather than outreach efforts. Third, the reliability of the results may be limited by the search strategy employed, which prioritized finding a broad range of articles. However, because this was a program evaluation focused on program improvement (Patton, 1997), we preferred to cast a wide net, given that the primary search strategies largely missed coverage in several regions. Finally, the coding of tone was based on the proportion of content in an article that was positive or negative toward the law and may have been more subjective than other variables; the kappa scores for the coding of tone (78.8%) reflect lower levels of reliability than the kappa scores for the coding of the main message variables (87.9% to 100%), which were well defined in the variable description manual.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For smoke-free laws to be effective in protecting nonsmokers from secondhand smoke, the public and business proprietors must comply with these laws. For this to happen, the public and business proprietors must first be aware of the provisions of the law and why it is needed. The MDCH and its partners sought to educate the public and the business communities about the Michigan smoke-free law, frame the law as an evidence-based public health measure, and set a positive tone for its implementation. Coordination with partners ensured messages were consistent and updated. The results of this analysis suggest that disseminated messages appeared in newspaper coverage across the state and favorable coverage generally outweighed the negative coverage. This suggests an educated public and media.

State health departments and their partners can play an important role in ensuring smooth implementation of smoke-free laws and other public health policies by providing the public and business proprietors with clear, accurate, compelling information on the rationale for these policies, their provisions, and their effects. In communicating this information, these public health organizations can draw on the findings of previous studies of effective messages and messaging approaches. In addition, by evaluating their efforts, public health groups can add to this body of evidence, thereby informing future initiatives.

Further work in this area could identify specific types of news media outreach activities that are especially effective in generating extensive, prominent, accurate, and favorable media coverage of smoke-free policies, as well as the optimal intensity of these activities. In particular, studies could examine what approaches are most effective in prompting news media outlets to pick up positive messages about these policies. Studies could also examine whether certain positive and negative messages about smoke-free policies are more likely to be picked up by news media because reporters or news organizations consider them intrinsically more newsworthy.

## Acknowledgments

We thank Linda Pederson for her help in mentoring on media analysis and calculating interrater reliabilities, Sarah Bailey for her help in the coding testing process, and Bill Marx for his help in obtaining articles. At the time of the study, Kate Frantz was interning through the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Office on Smoking and Health. The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the CDC. This project was supported in part by an appointment to the Research Participation Program at the CDC administered by the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE) through an interagency agreement between the U.S. Department of Energy and the CDC. Kate Frantz received support as a fellow for the evaluation from ORISE and, after the fellowship, for completion of the manuscript through McKing Consulting Corp.

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TABLE 1

## Newspapers Categorized by Michigan Department of Community Health Regions

## Upper Peninsula Region

*The Daily Mining Gazette*—Houghton, Houghton County*Daily Press*—Escanaba, Delta County*The Daily Globe*—Ironwood, Gogebic County*The Evening News*—Sault Ste. Marie, Chippewa County*L'Anse Sentinel*—L'Anse, Baraga County*The Mining Journal*—Marquette, Marquette County*The Sault Star*—Sault Ste. Marie, Chippewa County*The Daily News*—Iron Mountain

## Northern Region

*The Alpena News*—Alpena County*Central Michigan Life*—Isabella County*Gaylord Herald Times*—Otsego County*Leelanau Enterprise*—Leelanau County*Morning Star* (Leader and Kalkaskian Weekly Newspaper)—Kalkaska, Kalkaska County*The Morning Sun*—Mount Pleasant (serving central Michigan), Isabella County*Petoskey News Review*—Petoskey, Emmet County*Traverse City Record-Eagle*—Grand Traverse County*Ogemaw County Herald*

## Western Region

*Grand Haven Tribune*—Grand Haven, Ottawa County*Grand Rapids Press*—Kent County*Holland Sentinel*—Holland, Ottawa/Allegan Counties*Kalamazoo Gazette*—Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo County*Muskegon Chronicle*—Muskegon County*Niles Daily Star*—Berrien/Cass Counties

## Mid-Michigan Region

*Argus Press*—Owosso, Shiawassee County*Battle Creek Enquirer*—Calhoun County*Daily Telegram*—Adrian, Lenawee County*Gongwer News Service Michigan*—Lansing, Ingham County*Jackson Citizen Patriot*—Jackson County*Lansing City Pulse*—Lansing, Ingham County*Lansing State Journal*—Lansing, Ingham County*The State News*—East Lansing, Ingham County

## Southeast Michigan Region

*Advisor & Source Newspapers*—Shelby Township, Macomb County*Ann Arbor.com*—Washtenaw County*Arab Detroit*—Wayne County*Between the Lines*—Livonia

*C & G News*—Warren, Macomb County  
*Crain’s Detroit Business*—Detroit/Southeast Michigan  
*Daily Tribune*—Oakland County  
*Dearborn Press and Guide*—Dearborn  
*Detroit Free Press*—Wayne County  
*The Detroit News*—Wayne County  
*The Eastern Echo*—Eastern Michigan University, Washtenaw County  
*The Herald-Palladium*  
*Hometownlife.com*  
*Livingston County Daily Press and Argus*—Howell, Livingston County  
*The Macomb Daily*—Macomb, Macomb County  
*Monroe Community College Newspaper*—Monroe County  
*Monroe Evening News*—Monroe, Monroe County  
*Oakland Press*—Oakland County  
*Royal Oak Daily Tribune*—Royal Oak, Oakland County  
*Southgate News Herald*—Southgate, Wayne County  
*The Voice*—serving northern Macomb and St. Claire Counties  
*Washtenaw Voice*—Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County

Thumb Region

*Bay City Times*—Bay City, Bay County  
*Fenton Press*  
*Flint Journal*—Genesee County  
*The Grand Blanc View*—Genesee County  
*Huron Daily Tribune*—Upper Thumb area  
*Midland Daily News*—Midland County  
*Port Huron Times Herald*—St. Clair County  
*Saginaw News*—Saginaw, Saginaw County  
*Tri-City Times*—Imlay City, Lapeer County

Statewide

*AP*  
*MLIVE.com*  
*Michigan Messenger*

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Author Manuscript

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**TABLE 2**

**Media Tools Used and Disseminated by MDCH, TFM, and CSA Related to Michigan’s Statewide Smoke-Free Law**

<b>Media Tool</b>	<b>Dissemination</b>	<b>Audience</b>
Included in content analysis		
Talking points	Disseminated to local contractors	Local media, legislators
“Swiss cheese” news releases	Disseminated to local contractors	Local media
MDCH news releases	Released to state media contacts	Statewide media outlets
Business presentation	Disseminated to local contractors and utilized by MDCH, TFM, and CSA staff	Business groups, service groups
Community presentations	Disseminated to local contractors and utilized by MDCH, TFM, and CSA staff	Community groups, general public
Frequently asked questions document	Disseminated to local contractors, website	General public, businesses, media
Business postcard	Mailed to Michigan businesses; website	Michigan businesses
Bar/Restaurant postcard	Mailed to Michigan bars/restaurants; website	Michigan bars/restaurants
TV ad	Disseminated by MDCH; in-kind support from Michigan Association of Broadcasters and Cable	General public, businesses, legislators
Excluded from content analysis		
Social media	Posted on Facebook and Twitter pages	Advocates, general public
Blog	Posted online by TFM	Advocates, general public
1–800 number (complaint/info line)	Publicized through media and local contractors	General public, businesses, media
MDCH smoke-free law website	Publicized through media and local contractors	General public, businesses, media

NOTE: MDCH = Michigan Department of Community Health; TFM = Tobacco-Free Michigan; CSA = Campaign for Smoke-Free Air.

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