

UPS Healthy Connections – Informed Choices in the News

An Excerpt from the **New York Times**

United Parcel Service, which has a work force of nearly 428,000 and spent \$2.6 billion on employee health care last year, began offering a smoking cessation program in February to the estimated 13 percent of its employees who use tobacco.

"We decided this was the time to do this," said Judy Pirnie Smith, a registered nurse who is a health and productivity manager at UPS.

Another employer, the Union Pacific railroad, which has 50,000 workers, credits a smoking cessation program it adopted two years with helping cut the smoking rate to about 17 percent of its work force, compared with 40 percent as recently as the 1990s.

Participants often say they need the help an employer program can provide.

"The day my dad passed away, I started praying for a solution, a way to quit smoking," said Monte Hall, a 43-year-old cargo handler with UPS in Louisville, Ky. His father, who smoked a pack and a half a day, died from lung disease a few years ago.

The solution came in the form of the company's program. Mr. Hall got advice and encouragement from counselors, read articles they suggested and used nicotine patches. He says he has not had a cigarette since Feb. 24 (2007).

UPS belongs to the National Business Group on Health, which surveyed 58 of its biggest members and found that nearly two-thirds offered stop-smoking programs as part of their health plans. That was a sharp contrast with the mid-1990s, when companies rarely covered smoking cessation, according to Ms. Darling.

A survey by the nonprofit Kaiser Family Foundation found that smoking programs are offered by one in three companies with more than 200 workers. Among smaller firms, that was one in 12.

The number of employers sponsoring the programs "is going up even while firms are cutting back on medical benefits" in general to limit costs, said Dr. Steven A. Schroeder, director of the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center at the University of California, San Francisco, which promotes stop-smoking programs nationally.

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By Milt Freudenheim
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