

# GRILLING UP A HEALTHY CHANGE!

## Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story

### AT A GLANCE:

Established in January 2011, A La Mexicana serves up authentic Mexican cuisine to communities in western Maine. While the original restaurant was destroyed in a kitchen fire in 2017, that did not stop brothers Jose and Ocho from working hard to reopen not one - *but two* - new locations in 2018! In August 2020, Jose and Ocho agreed to partner with the The City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Team to ensure that both their new restaurants guarantee a tobacco free environment for their customers to enjoy their food.

### PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE:

According to a 2015 CDC report, people working in food preparation are more likely to use tobacco, compared to people in other industries. During 2004-2010, nearly one fifth (19.6%) of U.S. working adults smoked cigarettes, and of all the industry sectors, smoking rates for food services sector workers (30%) were the highest.

Tobacco use in the workplace not only affects the smoker, it may also affect the quality of food they prepare. Even if employees smoke outside, the smoke settles on your clothes and the smell lingers on your hands. This is why food preparation workers are required to wash their hands after smoking. Without washing your hands, contaminants from the smoke - which contains over 7,000 chemicals, including many carcinogens and other toxic chemicals - can find their way into the food. This not only ruins the taste, it adds unnecessary risk for your customers.

### APPROACH:

In conjecture with the information above, the high rates of tobacco use in the food preparation industry is alarming for a handful of reasons. Thirdhand smoke poses unnecessary health risks for restaurant food preparation, as well exposing non-smoking staff (and potentially customers) to secondhand smoke. As we know, secondhand smoke has been linked to an increase in lung cancer and heart disease among adult smokers. Jerica Chaves knew that the health and safety of employees and customers is paramount to their role in the community. When a City of Portland District Tobacco Prevention Partner reached out to Jerica to talk about the tobacco policy at A La Mexicana, they immediately expressed enthusiasm on adopting a "best level" tobacco policy to ensure they are protecting their employees and customers. Our DTPP assisted them in creating a "best level" tobacco policy that fits their restaurant and selecting appropriate signage for their facility entryways.

### RESULTS:

Smoke-free workplace policies are the only way to protect workers from secondhand smoke. There is no amount of cleaning, ventilating or creating separate areas for smokers that negates the effect of secondhand smoke. This led to both A La Mexicana locations adopting and implementing a best level policy to ensure that they are protecting the health of all their workers, and demonstrating their commitment to promoting community wellness. In addition to this, the team at A La Mexicana now has plenty of resources on the Maine Quitlink available for employees to provide to friends and family who are trying to kick tobacco!



**"The only thing you'll see smoking here are our sizzling fajitas. We are a tobacco free restaurant"**  
**Jerica Chaves, Manager of A La Mexicana**

