



Chowchilla Takes Huge Step to Healthier Outdoor Recreation



INTRODUCTION

In March 2021, the City of Chowchilla in Madera County passed a policy that prohibits smoking in outdoor public spaces—parks, walking trails, skate parks, swimming pools, and outdoor dining. Chowchilla made this policy even stronger by including electronic smoking devices. The new policy is modeled after a similar law the City of Madera passed in 2019.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The Madera County Tobacco Control Program began working on this policy in early 2019. From the start, staff focused on building relationships with other organizations that serve the community, including First 5 and the city's Parks and Community Service Department. In an effort to build recognition and trust in the community, staff often went beyond their scope of work—joining other coalitions and attending as many community events as possible—even if it meant they weren't working directly on the policy.

Although the proposed policy steadily gained the community's attention, the pandemic quickly made it impossible to

have in-person meetings to discuss the importance of smokefree places. Staff had to get creative to reach out to the community and continue building support. They partnered with the Students Working Against Tobacco Youth Coalition and the Madera County Food Bank to add educational materials about secondhand smoke to food boxes distributed to over 500 residents of Chowchilla! This is just one example of staff's quick thinking and collaborative approach to promote the issue of smokefree recreational areas. Several community members stepped up to voice public support when the policy was read at the March 23rd City Council meeting, and it passed unanimously.

This victory shows that outside-the-box thinking can go a long way when circumstances change. Additionally, building relationships with other community organizations shows residents and elected officials that you prioritize making the community a healthier place, even if it means your specific goal temporarily takes a back seat.