

Cig-Arrête® Case Study

Ashfield Girls' High has become the first school in Northern Ireland to be recognised as smoke free.

The Ulster Cancer Foundation presented an award to the East Belfast high school for successfully enforcing a non-smoking environment. Specialist cigarette alarms, which detect low concentrations of cigarette smoke or flames from a match or lighter, have been installed throughout the school. The alarms deliver a voice message warning pupils that a teacher has been called and instructing them to put out their cigarettes immediately.

Clare Smith, UCF cancer prevention officer, says "most teenagers who smoke are persuaded to do so by their peers, therefore the school initiative will help break the cycle of the smoking habit being passed on."



Tracy Rossborough and prefect Angela show off the "Smoke Free School" Certificate

"This is a tremendous accolade for the school.

Research has shown that most teenagers who smoke are encouraged to do so by a friend or someone their own age – so introducing a smoke free environment within the school can only have positive benefits," she says. "Also, if a young person can reach their late teens without smoking, then they are much less likely to ever smoke. Ashfield Girls' School should be congratulated for taking positive action to help protect the health and well being of its pupils."

The school participates in a number of initiatives aimed at improving the health of the pupils including the Global Rock Challenge in which over 150 pupils per year sign up to a healthier lifestyle. Eliminating smoking from the school definitely supports all its health related initiatives.

The Problem

In an innovative program of inclusion, the school encourages pupils to comment on any aspect of school life on the web-site forum. Smelly and unhealthy toilets were a frequently highlighted problem. Smoke actually drifted into the corridors from the toilets, and worse still, into reception where visitors waited.

Parents of junior pupils complained that their children would not use the toilets because they felt intimidated; indeed one girl hadn't used the toilets once in her three and a half years at the school ... until the alarms were installed.

Some pupils were often late for classes because they nipped into the toilets for a quick "puff" and there was added disruption to teaching because of the increased flow of pupils to and from the toilets. One teacher complained of constant squeaking and banging of toilet doors.

Adeline Dinsmore, Principal of Ashfield Girls' School, says smoking within the school grounds and buildings is not conducive to a healthy learning environment. "Like most schools, we had a small but persistent number of pupils who smoked in the toilets, mainly between classes."

Determined to rid the school of the problem the Senior Management Team was willing to try anything to tackle it.

Innovation for a new tomorrow

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The solution

The school researched possible approaches and found the solution in the Cig-Arrête® Tobacco Control System, manufactured by Radal Technology Ltd. This specially designed system detects tiny concentrations of tobacco smoke or drug residues and delivers a loud voice warning to the smokers. It could also alert staff via a beacon or a central control panel.



The Cig-Arrête System gets the 'Thumbs Up' from Ashfield

The specialist alarms were fitted in all the main toilet areas and it was announced to the school that the no smoking policy was going to be rigorously enforced. There was no longer scope for excuses such as "It was the girl who was in before me who was smoking".

One girl, who missed the announcement, was caught on the first day. This reinforced the message and proved the alarms worked.

Since then there has been no smoking in the toilets and the school can proudly boast that as a fact ... because they can prove it.

The benefits

Apart from the obvious health and discipline advantages, the school highlights a number of unexpected benefits:

- Pupils were less late to class as they were no longer off to the toilets for a quick puff
- A senior girl said "Because of the alarms I can not smoke in the toilets ... but I now realise that I can go a whole day without a cigarette". The no smoking in the school may reach into the after-school life.
- Use of water from the water machines has increased, a recognised benefit to help children's concentration
- Ulster cancer Foundation award the school the first "Smoke-free School Certificate in Northern Ireland" and are working with the school on a program to help teenage smokers quit.
- Caretaker & cleaning staff have commented that the toilets are much easier to clean:
 - No butts and ash
 - No cigarette packets in the bowl
 - No food remnants (pupils used to congregate to smoke & eat their lunches.

One teacher of 25 years said "There was so much activity in the toilets that I felt part of my job was as a toilet attendant – I was obliged to keep going in to see what was going on. Since the alarms were fitted, this is no longer necessary: I've now had the best teaching days of my career!"

The Principal is delighted, she now proudly quotes from a before and after survey "After carrying out an audit, we discovered that **75%** of pupils didn't like to use the toilets because of the smell of smoke. We believed that this was not acceptable for the majority of pupils and action needed to be taken. "The results were astounding. From the day the alarms were installed, smoking in the toilets stopped. We carried out a further survey and found that **85%** of pupils are now happier to use the toilets and **79%** report an improved atmosphere."

"Within a matter of days, we solved a problem we had struggled for years to combat. This new and successful innovation sends a positive message to existing and new potential parents, that is, Ashfield are taking positive steps to improve the health of all their students. We will be marketing ourselves to parents as a "smoke free school".

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