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**SMOKING BAN HAS NO IMPACT ON FOOD, DRINK SALES:
U OF T RESEARCH**

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Instituting smoke-free bylaws in public places like bars and restaurants has no impact on food and drink sales, say researchers at the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit.

“When the City of Ottawa implemented a 100 per cent smoke-free bylaw, without providing for separately ventilated designated smoking areas, strong opposition came from bar and restaurant owners saying that such a ban would severely impact their business,” says Dr. Roberta Ferrence, director of the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit and a professor of public health sciences at U of T. “We decided to examine those claims to see if there was a link between a full smoking ban and sales at restaurants and bars. We found no evidence of such a link.”

Ottawa implemented its non-smoking bylaw in all work and public places Aug. 1, 2001. Enforcement began in September, with the city achieving a 95 per cent compliance rate. Using data from the Ontario Ministry of Finance (March 1998 to June 2002) detailing provincial and GST taxable sales of licensed restaurants and bars and unlicensed restaurants, the researchers adjusted sales for inflation. They also controlled for Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and other factors.

They found that, relative to rising retail sales, bar and restaurant sales in Ottawa have remained relatively constant since early 2000. (The bylaw was instituted at a time when the ratios of restaurant and bar sales to retail sales were already in decline.)

“If the concerns expressed by hospitality owners were true [that food and drink sales would decline], we would expect to see a downward shift in the ratios of restaurant and bar sales relative to retail sales after the implementation of the bylaw,” notes Ferrence, a senior scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. “In fact, what we observed when we factored in this declining trend and seasonal variations, was no statistically significant impact on bar and restaurant sales.”

This finding is consistent with previous research, she says. Jurisdictions in Canada, the US and Australia have also found that smoke-free bylaws do not adversely affect restaurant and bar sales. Since the Ontario Tobacco Control Act was passed in 1994, 73 of 446 municipalities have implemented smoke-free bylaws in restaurants alone or in restaurants and bars, she says. However, in many communities, the public remains unprotected in these locations.

“This is a very clear message that has been shown time and time again – eliminating smoking in bars and restaurants will not negatively impact on sales. And when we include the reduction in health and labour costs with the elimination of smoking in public places, it’s a win-win for everyone.”

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Ferrence's fellow researchers are Rita Luk, research officer at the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, and Dr. Gerhard Gmel, senior scientist and co-director of research at the Swiss Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems.

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