

**Written Testimony of
Theatre Communications Group
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The New York City Council
Smoking Ban in NYC Parks and Public Spaces**

Laurie Baskin
Director of Government & Education Programs
Theatre Communications Group
520 Eighth Avenue, 24th Floor
New York, NY 10018
(212) 609-5900 ext. 228, lbaskin@tcg.org

My thanks to the Members of the City Council for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Laurie Baskin. I am director of Government & Education Programs at Theatre Communications Group (TCG.) TCG is the national organization for the American theatre, and it exists to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional not-for-profit American theatre. Its programs serve nearly 500 member theatres, including 61 in New York City and more than 12,000 individuals nationwide. In all of its endeavors, TCG seeks to increase the organizational efficiency of its member theatres, cultivate and celebrate the artistic talent and achievements of the field and promote a larger public understanding of, and appreciation for, the theatre.

TCG appreciates the City's desire to improve the health of its citizens and wholeheartedly applauds all efforts toward that end. TCG is not encouraging people to smoke. At the same time, we would like to share with you the importance of theatrical smoking to our art form.

The tradition of employing theatrical smoking to express mood and tenor, to develop plot, and to typify a character's personality is important in historical and contemporary theatrical works both well-known and obscure. In Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* smoking is an integral behavior of the character Martha. Hal Holbrook's one-man show *Mark Twain Tonight!* includes a cigar-puffing portrayal of Mark Twain, whose gruff, boisterous personality would be unrecognizable without a lit cigar in hand. In the Pulitzer prize-winning play, *Anna in the Tropics*, the ethos of the play's locale, a Tampa cigar factory in the late 1920s, comes alive with the visual element that wreaths of cigar smoke imbue to a darkened stage. Cigars are central to the characters' livelihood and culture.

Among TCG's membership is The Public Theater on Lafayette Street, which also presents performances at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park. The Public also, from time to time, performs in other parks around the City, as do other theatre companies.

TCG's member theatres, in accordance with the indoor smoking ban already in place, most regularly use herbal cigarettes in performances where smoking is called for by the playwright or the director. But, there are occasions in which a regular cigarette or a cigar may be called for. I understand it is difficult and/or expensive to find herbal cigars. Therefore, in the interest of freedom of expression and artistic expression, TCG requests that new legislation aimed at banning outdoor smoking, provide some provision for a theatre company to apply for an exemption or a waiver for tobacco products for a particular performance.

I also just want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support that TCG received from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs for our national Free Night of Theatre Program, which is currently underway.

Thank you.