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Survey answers give PACA new ideas

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The Tobacco subcommittee of Partners Acting as Change Agents (PACA) met Thursday at First Christian Church to discuss the results of its Great American Smokeout Survey.

There were two questions listed on the survey - "Does anyone in your household smoke?" and "Is your home smoke free?"

Of the 274 homes in Woodward responding to the survey, just under 5 percent of all homes in Woodward County, 209 were homes with non-smokers while only 65 were homes with smokers. Roughly 91 percent of all homes are smoke free. The primary goal of the survey was to gather data and statistics to develop community outreach projects that warn against the dangers of second-hand smoke, especially in relation to kids.

"What do we want to continue to do to combat that 9 percent?" asked Stephanie U'Ren, project director for PACA.

"Just start putting it out there, look what you're doing to your kids," said Lester Neill, a member of the tobacco subcommittee.

The group also discussed people who smoke in their cars with children present. According to Lana Shaffer, field consultant with Turning Point for the Woodward County Health Department, those people who're going to smoke in their cars with children present are probably the same ones who are going to smoke in their homes. Neill disagreed, pointing out that people will sometimes take better care of their home than they will their vehicle.

"People think if you're in a car and you crack that window it'll suck it out," Neill said.

PACA coalition members decided to add two new questions to the survey for next year including whether any individual has changed any habits in regard to smoking around children, and whether people smoke inside their vehicles with children present.

According to Robin Tate, co-chairman of the Woodward Council of the American Cancer Society, each year exposure to second-hand smoke causes pneumonia, bronchitis and other respiratory infections in approximately 150,000 children nationwide. Around 15,000 of those children end up hospitalized with respiratory illnesses. Numbers from the American Cancer Society show about 3,000 non-smoking adults die of lung cancer each year as a result of breathing second-hand smoke.

U'Ren, PACA has immediate plans to develop media and community campaigns to warn against the dangers of second-hand smoke.

Outreach activities PACA has planned for December include campaign efforts to get schools in Woodward County to adopt a voluntary "24/7 no tobacco use policy." The Woodward Public Schools have such a policy in place. The policy states that there are to be no tobacco products on school premises at any time. According to Neill, the policy is geared toward adults carrying or using tobacco products on school grounds before 7 a.m. or after 4 p.m.

“It’s the concept that if kids see it, then they’ll want to do it,” Neill said. The PACA coalition plans to use such student-led groups as the FCCLA, 4-H and the Student Council as liaisons to implement the voluntary policy into other school districts. U’Ren said students joined forces with Superintendent Bill Denton and Assistant Superintendent Richard Burney to put together a policy in Woodward.

“I think as far as compliance or policing the issue, it’s doable,” said U’Ren who referenced a recent football game at Woodward High School where students contacted administrative officials to report an adult who was smoking on school property.

Members of the student-led coalition Students Working Against Tobacco (S.W.A.T.) will also be holding Reward Reminder Visits to area merchants who sell tobacco Dec. 21 and 28. A middle school student will team with an adult mentor and the youth will attempt to purchase tobacco. If the merchant follows Oklahoma State Law including asking for proper identification, and requiring a store clerk to access tobacco products in a locked case, the reward will be small coupons or gift certificates for a job well done.

If merchants are found in violation of the law, they will be turned over to the proper authorities and could face fines and penalties. According to U’Ren, last year there were two local businesses in Woodward found to be in violation of the Oklahoma State Law passed last Nov. 1 stating all tobacco products must be taken from the shelf by the clerk, tobacco products must be kept under lock and key and proper identification is required in all tobacco sales.

Members of the SWAT coalition will also be educating merchants on the proper signage and placement of tobacco products. According to U’Ren, in March of 1999, major tobacco companies in the United States reached a “master settlement” agreement with several states, Oklahoma being one of them. As part of the agreement, tobacco companies were required to release classified information regarding the deceptive tactics they use to pull in younger customers.

“If they can get an 80 year old to start smoking, they’re only going to get five years. But, if you can get a 10-year-old to start smoking, you might have a customer for life,” said U’Ren.

Basically, the voluntary compliance is based on a “four foot rule.”

If tobacco products or signs are placed in a store below four feet, they’re said to be targeting children. Merchants found to be in violation of the rule will be educated on youth education and tobacco use prevention