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## **Record Numbers of Oklahoma Smokers Seek Help in Quitting Helpline Calls Rise in Advance of March 31 Federal Tobacco Tax Increase**

**OKLAHOMA CITY** – State health officials are reporting a record number of calls to the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline in response to a 62-cent per pack increase in the federal cigarette tax. The increase in federal taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products will take effect March 31, 2009 and will apply to both tribal and non-tribal sales.

“We’ve recently seen the number of calls increase from about 450 to over 1,100 per week,” said Tracey Strader, executive director of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust. “Surveys show three out of four smokers in Oklahoma want to quit and it’s clear the new federal tax is helping to encourage thousands to quit now.”

With the increase, a pack-a-day smoker in Oklahoma will spend more than \$1,600 on cigarettes each year, or about \$135 per month. Other costs of smoking include higher cleaning and maintenance, lower resale prices for homes and cars, and higher insurance premiums. Former smokers and their loved ones also benefit over time as they avoid the costs of diseases and illnesses caused by smoking or secondhand smoke.

By calling the Helpline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669), Oklahomans receive free telephone based coaching sessions with a professional quit coach. Coaching focuses on developing a quit plan tailored to the caller’s personal needs and offering critical support in sticking with the plan. Most Oklahomans who call the Helpline for coaching also receive free nicotine patches or gum mailed directly to their homes.

(MORE)

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“Independent evaluation results show that combining Helpline coaching with the use of cessation medications increases a person’s chances of quitting eight times over cold turkey alone,” said Strader. “We’re fortunate in Oklahoma to be able to offer these cost-effective, quality services to all callers free of charge.”

Over 22,000 Oklahomans were served by the Helpline in fiscal year 2008.

The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline is available day and night seven days a week. Services are available to Oklahomans who smoke as well as those who use other tobacco products. Services are also available in Spanish by calling 1-800-793-1552, and for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing through Video Relay at 1-866-748-2436. For more information on the Helpline, please visit:

<http://www.ok.gov/tset/Programs/Helpline.html>.

The Helpline is funded primarily by the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust with assistance from the Oklahoma State Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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*The Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust was established through a constitutional amendment approved by Oklahoma voters in 2000. While most state governments have failed to keep their promise to use tobacco settlement funds for tobacco prevention and other programs to improve health, Oklahomans have created an endowment to assure that funds will be available for these purposes for generations to come. To learn more go to: [www.tset.ok.gov](http://www.tset.ok.gov).*