



STATE OF OKLAHOMA

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Thousands of Smokers Projected to Quit as New Tobacco Tax Takes Effect – Free Cessation Assistance Available

OKLAHOMA CITY – The Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust is encouraging smokers and other tobacco users to beat the New Year rush and call the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at 1-866-PITCH-EM (1-866-748-2436) now.

The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline is expecting to receive thousands of calls in the coming weeks from those deciding to become tobacco-free in 2005. Although the New Year is historically a popular time of year to quit, more Oklahomans than usual are expected to quit tobacco on or around News Years Day 2005 when the state cigarette tax goes up by 55 cents per pack. Based on experience in other states, up to 20,000 Oklahomans are projected to quit as a result.

Many smokers are also paying an additional 10 cents per pack due to a price increase announced earlier this month by both Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds, the nation's two largest cigarette manufacturers. This price increase in combination with the tobacco tax increase means that most Oklahomans who continue to smoke will be faced with paying a total of 65 cents more per pack by January 1.

A state health department survey indicates that 79 percent of adult smokers in Oklahoma are interested in quitting smoking and national research findings show that the "expense associated with smoking" is one of the top two reasons for quitting smoking.

Top Reasons Smokers Decide to Quit Smoking	
1. Concern for current or future health	92%
2. Expense associated with smoking	59%
3. Concern for the effect of smoke on others	56%
4. Setting a good example for children	52%
5. Advice from doctor or dentist	50%
6. Pressure from family, friends, or co-workers	47%
7. Bad breath, smell or taste	36%
8. Illness or death of a friend or relative	24%
9. Smoking restriction at work	20%

“Whatever your personal reasons may be, there’s probably never been a better time for Oklahomans to quit using tobacco,” said Tracey Strader, executive director of the Endowment. “The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline stands ready to assist in making 2005 a healthier and more prosperous new year for all Oklahomans interested in quitting.”

Funded entirely by the interest earnings of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, the Helpline provides free, personalized cessation assistance by professional counselors. Callers enrolled in the Helpline program work with the same specialist throughout the quitting process. During a series of five telephone-based sessions, Helpline Specialists assist participants in developing and working through a quit plan based on their individual needs.

As a new service offered for the first time this year, the Helpline is also able to offer free nicotine replacement products such as nicotine patches and gum on a limited basis to those who are on Medicare or those who are totally uninsured when they participate in the Helpline’s intensive counseling program. Other callers are assisted by the specialists to identify and access benefits that may be available to them through their employer, Medicaid, or other insurance to cover the cost of nicotine replacement products and other cessation aids.

“Although the Helpline has only recently started to offer these products, it’s already clear that there’s a huge demand,” said Strader. “Research clearly shows that combining professional cessation counseling with the use of cessation products is the most effective way to quit.”

The Helpline’s hours of operation are 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days a week, and staff will return any messages left after hours. Participants may also receive information on other cessation programs that may be available in their community or on the Internet.

For more information, please see: www.tset.ok.gov/programs/helpline.html.

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