



STATE OF OKLAHOMA

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Tobacco Tax Increase Encourages Thousands to Quit *Number of Callers to Helpline Since Approval of Tax Increase Approaching 10,000*

OKLAHOMA CITY – The Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust announced today that nearly 10,000 tobacco users have received free help with quitting through the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline since Oklahoma voters approved an increase to the state tobacco tax on November 2, 2004. The toll-free Helpline, 1-866-PITCH 'EM (1-866-748-2436), was launched by the Endowment in September 2003.

“It's been phenomenal,” said Tracey Strader, executive director of the Endowment. “The overwhelming use of Helpline services since approval of the tobacco tax represents nearly an eight-fold increase over the same time period last year.” During the month of January 2005 alone, over 2,400 Oklahomans called the Helpline. The increase in the tobacco tax took effect on New Year's Day.

“Some of the dramatic jump in the number of calls is probably due to more people hearing about the free services available from the Helpline, but it's clear that the higher cost of smoking has helped to encourage many to quit,” said Strader. “For every person who calls the Helpline, we know there are others who are quitting on their own or with other assistance.” Statewide surveys have shown that four out of five adult smokers in Oklahoma are interested in quitting smoking.

The Helpline provides free professional cessation assistance through a series of telephone coaching or counseling sessions with a Helpline Specialist. Callers enrolled in the Helpline program work with the same Specialist throughout their quitting process to develop and work through a personalized quit plan based on their individual needs. Helpline Specialists also help callers explore their options for using other effective treatments such as nicotine replacement products and community-based cessation classes.

“All Oklahomans who want to quit using tobacco are invited to call the Helpline and take advantage of these free services,” said Strader. 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. For more information, please see:
www.tset.ok.gov/programs/helpline.html .

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