



STATE OF OKLAHOMA

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Tobacco Users Urged to Quit on World No Tobacco Day, May 31 *Health Care Professionals Praised for Role in Promoting Cessation, Calls to Helpline*

OKLAHOMA CITY – In observance of World No Tobacco Day on Tuesday, May 31, the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust is inviting tobacco users to call the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline for free services to help them quit. More than 10,000 tobacco users have received free help with quitting through the Helpline since Oklahoma voters approved an increase to the state tobacco tax on November 2, 2004.

“Although the number of calls to the Helpline is already tremendous, we hope that many more Oklahomans will decide to call in the coming days for World No Tobacco Day 2005,” said Tracey Strader, executive director of the Endowment. Observed annually on May 31st, World No Tobacco Day is the only global event established to call attention to the impact of tobacco use on public health and to promote quitting. This year the focus for World No Tobacco Day is on the role of health care professionals in reducing tobacco use.

Strader praised Oklahoma health care professionals for playing a major role in encouraging their patients to quit. “At least 85% of Helpline callers who received health care in the last 12 months were advised during their visit to quit,” said Strader. “By identifying smokers, advising them to quit, and encouraging them to call the Helpline, health care professionals are literally saving thousands of Oklahoma lives.” National studies have found that advice from a physician doubles the likelihood that a smoker will try to quit.

According to the state health department, key facts on tobacco use in Oklahoma include:

- Tobacco use kills about 6,000 Oklahomans each year.
- Tobacco is our leading cause of preventable death, killing more Oklahomans than alcohol, auto accidents, AIDS, suicides, murders, and illegal drugs combined.
- Tobacco use cost Oklahomans over \$2 billion in medical expenses and lost productivity every year, or an average of about \$600 per person per year.
- Over 600,000 adult Oklahomans, about one in four, currently use tobacco.
- 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.

The toll-free Helpline, 1-866-PITCH ‘EM (1-866-748-2436), was launched by the Endowment in September 2003. 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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