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THROUGH WITH CHEW WEEK HIGHLIGHTS NEGATIVE EFFECTS WITH SMOKELESS TOBACCO

*CDC, American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute and Mayo Clinic unanimously say,
“Smokeless tobacco is NOT a safe alternative to smoking”*

OKLAHOMA CITY – Feb. 18, 2011 – As the harmful effects of smoking continue to receive national attention, tobacco companies have shifted their focus to smokeless tobacco products, claiming them to be a “safe” alternative to smoking cigarettes and actively working to build new customers. Through With Chew Week Feb. 20 – 26th, highlights the truth, that there are no “safe” tobacco products.

In Oklahoma, tobacco companies have long used our culture of independence and our rural Western image against us with targeted smokeless product marketing. Increasingly, however, these companies are shifting product flavorings, package designs and marketing campaigns to appeal to a younger, trendier audience – an audience that increasingly includes teens. But, no amount of fruit flavor or fancy marketing can alter the harmful effects of smokeless products, including tooth decay, gum disease, cancer, heart attack or stroke.

“Smokeless tobacco is re-emerging as a dangerous threat to the collective health and wellness of Oklahomans,” said Tracey Strader, executive director, TSET. “In the past, smokeless products were treated as niche market for the tobacco industry. But with increased FDA oversight on cigarettes, the tobacco companies are increasing efforts to convince current smokers to adopt smokeless when they are in places that otherwise don’t allow smoking. In fact, research shows that people who use both cigarettes and smokeless products have an extremely difficult time trying to quit either.”

Despite the tobacco industry’s marketing hype, the fact is that smokeless products can deliver a high dose of nicotine equal to that of two cigarettes. Meanwhile, smokeless tobacco use accounts for an estimated 80 percent of all oral cancer, as well as taking a role in heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke. American Cancer Society research discovered that men who switched from cigarettes to snuff or chewing tobacco had higher death rates than former smokers who stopped using all tobacco products.

This year, smokeless tobacco users are encouraged to quit during Through with Chew Week. Support to quit can come from friends and family as well as from dentists and health care providers.

The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) offers free support to Oklahomans who are trying to quit using smokeless tobacco offering free coaching as well as free patches or gum.

The Helpline is funded by the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET), the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Last year, the Helpline served more than 37,000 Oklahomans and is expecting to serve more than 40,000 this year.

The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline operates seven days a week. Services are available to Oklahomans who use tobacco products of any kind. Services are also available in Spanish by calling 1-800-793-1552. For more information about the Helpline, go to: www.ok.gov/tset/Programs/Helpline.html. For more information about quitting tobacco use go to: www.smokefree.gov.

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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.