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## **Tobacco-free efforts focus on financial burden**

Janes Jones, Muskogee Against Tobacco program coordinator, says that when discussing the impact of tobacco use, the focus often turns to its tragic health effects and loss of life. However, every business and citizen in Muskogee County also bears a financial burden.

Tobacco-Free Oklahoma Week, which runs through Sunday, highlights these burdens.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health reports that the average Oklahoma business loses \$3,734 each year for every employee who smokes. This is due to increased sick days and disability, higher medical and insurance costs, and shorter, less productive work lives. Oklahoma's annual health care costs caused by smoking are \$1.16 billion, including \$218 million in Medicaid costs.

Tracey Strader, executive director of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, said reducing tobacco use and making a commitment to better health must be a top priority if the state is to be economically successful.

"Existing and prospective employers closely examine health care costs when considering expansion and relocation," Strader said. "A healthy workforce will bolster our competitiveness and economic development."

The health department suggests that businesses take actions to improve the health of their employees. Simple steps, such as making business properties tobacco-free, and offering health insurance that covers tobacco cessation can improve the bottom line. More businesses also are participating in the Oklahoma Certified Healthy Business program sponsored by The Academy for State Goals, the Oklahoma Turning Point Council, The State Chamber of Commerce and the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

Jones said Muskogee Against Tobacco and the Muskogee Wellness Initiative are asking elected representatives to take the lead in supporting legislation that will lead to a healthier community.

"By allowing local communities to address tobacco issues, cities can more effectively ensure that all workers are protected from secondhand smoke and that illegal sales to minors are eliminated," Jones said.

The department of health said that even though smoking rates are high, the good news is that three out of four Oklahoma smokers want to quit. Serious quit attempts in the state are at an all-time high.

### **With cigarette money**

The price for a pack of cigarettes at a Muskogee convenience store is approximately \$5.20. If a smoker goes through a pack a day for a year, that's \$1,898. What can a smoker buy with that money if they kicked the habit? Here are some suggestions:

- Two Sharp LCD 47-inch flat-screen televisions (and have \$190 left over).
- 158 large Pepperoni Lovers pizza from Pizza Hut, with hand-tossed crust, delivered.
- One-year memberships for five people at Champion Fitness in Muskogee.
- Red roses once a week for more than a year.
- At a cost of about \$20 per person, steak dinners for two each week for 47 weeks.

## Resources to quit

- Businesses—Make it Your Business, a free program to enhance the health of employees. Contact local Communities of Excellence in Tobacco Control program, Jane Jones, program coordinator, [janej@health.ok.gov](mailto:janej@health.ok.gov) or 683-0321.
- Quitting—Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at (800) QUIT-NOW [(800) 784-8669]. Oklahomans receive free telephone-based coaching and a free two-week starter kit of nicotine patches or gum. Become An EX.org is a free online quit-smoking program that helps you re-learn life without cigarettes. [Somefree.gov](http://Somefree.gov) and [Women.Smokefree.gov](http://Women.Smokefree.gov) are free online quit-smoking programs that have access to live help through text messaging.