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Section: News

Area students target tobacco industry

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Members of Carter County Students Working Against Tobacco team members staged their own version of March Madness Wednesday to rally other students against the tobacco industry.

Students from Ardmore, Plainview, Wilson, Lone Grove and Springer schools organized a 3-on-3 basketball tournament at the YMCA in recognition of Kick Butts Day. Kick Butts Day is sponsored annually by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

SWAT teams across the country staged various events to raise awareness about continued tobacco marketing and sales to youngsters. They also are asking Congress to grant the U.S. Food and Drug Administration the authority to regulate tobacco products.

"The main thing is to make everybody aware of the tobacco industry's attempts to get kids to smoke," said Janie Horton, coordinator for the Carter County **Turning Point** Tobacco Coalition.

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids reported that tobacco companies spend \$245.8 million a year in Oklahoma to market their products. Nationwide, tobacco use kills more than 400,000 people annually and costs the nation nearly \$100 billion in health care bills every year.

Carter County SWAT coordinator Sally Mitchell said the local tournament ties into the NCAA basketball playoffs and demonstrates how being dedicated to athletics and avoiding tobacco products can prevent students from becoming one of the 6,000 Oklahoman who die every year from tobacco-related illness.

"The event is a way to promote good health and encourage kids to be tobacco-free," she said.

A new public health campaign created by an alliance of national organizations and state agencies, including the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust and the Oklahoma State Department of Health, was launched Monday to help more people quit smoking.

The "Become an EX" campaign is designed to educate smokers through advertisements on television, radio and online and features a free Web site, www.BecomeAnEX.org, which features tools and information for smokers who want to quit.

"We know there's no single approach to quitting that works for everyone," Sister Carolyn Stoutz, chairperson of the Carter County **Turning Point** Coalition (Tobacco Use Prevention), said. "BecomeAnEx.org is one more way for smokers in Carter County to get the help they need to break their addiction to tobacco."