

Several activities planned for Great American Smokeout

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The Carter County Turning Point Tobacco Use Prevention Coalition is encouraging smokers and other tobacco users in Carter County to participate in the Great American Smokeout by calling the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669).

Each year since 1977, the American Cancer Society has sponsored the Great American Smokeout on the third Thursday of November to help smokers quit for at least one day, in hopes they will quit forever.

The coalition is hosting a forum at 6 p.m. today at the Carter County Health Department to expose the tobacco industry's disproportionate targeting of certain ethnic and racial groups with its advertising and marketing approaches.

Event planners said the tobacco industry markets to everyone, but is especially dedicated to replacing the consumers they lose every year either to death and disease, or to the increasing number of people who have successfully beaten their nicotine addiction. Those "replacement smokers" come from the youth and from populations that the tobacco industry has overlooked in tobacco advertising in the past, including Latinos, African-Americans and Native Americans.

The speakers for the forum are the state coordinators for the Oklahoma Ethnic Tobacco Education Network.

Gene Johnson is the State Coordinator for the African-American Tobacco Education Network located in the Northeast Area Health Education Center at Tulsa Community College. A former New York City "beat cop" and Brevard County, Fla., narcotics officer, Johnson looked for opportunities to help prevent substance abuse and became a consultant for the Prevention and Intervention Programs at the Oklahoma State University Health and Sciences Center.

Diana Cournoyer is the State Coordinator of the Native American Tobacco Education Network with the Oklahoma City Area Inter-Tribal Health Board. She is an enrolled member of the Muscogee Creek Nation and Oglala Sioux Nation in South Dakota. Her background includes experience in education and substance abuse counseling in Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Yvon Fils-Aime is coordinator of the Hispanic/Latino Tobacco Education Network, an Oklahoma State Department of Health program that provides continuous education on tobacco use prevention and cessation to the Hispanic/Latino ethnic population. He consults regularly with statewide Hispanic/Latino leaders to identify the tobacco education needs of and provide suitable programs to Hispanic communities.

The Hispanic portion of the forum will be in Spanish and translated into English. Every effort is being made to get this information to the communities at risk. There is no charge for the forum and a boxed supper is being provided by Valero Refinery of Ardmore for those who pre-register at (580) 226-1838. The health department will provide free flu shots while supply lasts. There will also be an opportunity to sign up for free "Freedom from Smoking" cessation classes, which includes nicotine replacement for the uninsured.

In Wilson, the Students Working Against Tobacco team is helping the coalition with a "Tobacco for Turkeys" event in which the coalition provides Quit Kits in exchange for tobacco products, to encourage quitting for the day, and hopefully then for a lifetime. Participants are eligible to win a turkey provided by the Super C store in Wilson. The SWAT team will distribute information about the 4,000 chemicals in tobacco, many of which are toxic and cause cancer, and quotes from tobacco companies' own revealing documents. They will be set up in front of the Super C Store.

The Plainview SWAT team is recording public service announcements that also reveal quotes from Big Tobacco which can be heard on local radio stations.

"Most smokers want to completely quit smoking. The Great American Smokeout is a perfect time for tobacco users in Carter County to practice quitting or to finally quit for good," said Susie Williams, chairperson of the Carter County Turning Point Tobacco Use Prevention Coalition. "Through the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, free expert assistance is just a phone call away."

The Helpline provides free, personalized assistance by professional Quit Coaches. Callers enrolled in the Helpline's program work with the same quit coach throughout the quitting process. During a series of up to five telephone sessions, the coaches assist callers in developing and working through a quit plan based on their individual needs.

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.

The Carter County Turning Point Tobacco Use Prevention Coalition is one of 16 local coalitions across the state participating in the Communities of Excellence program that focuses on reducing the toll of tobacco in Oklahoma. Tobacco use is Oklahoma's leading preventable cause of death, killing about 5,700 Oklahomans each year — more than AIDS, alcohol, illegal drugs, murders, suicides and auto accidents combined. The Communities of Excellence program is funded through a grant from the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust.