

campaign for a **smoke-free** alberta

Provincial legislation credited for drop in tobacco consumption

Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta
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New data released by Alberta Finance reveals that tobacco shipments in the province are down for the first time in five years. The decline follows a 63 cent per 25-pack tobacco tax increase in April 2007 and the implementation of a province-wide smoking ban in January 2008.

"The *Tobacco Reduction Act* appears to be having the desired effect in Alberta" said Donna Hastings of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT and Nunavut. "We believe that the provincial smoking ban combined with last spring's tobacco tax increase is having a significant impact on tobacco use. The complementary timing of these two initiatives may be having a synergistic effect on reducing tobacco consumption throughout the province."

Overall cigarette shipments were down three percent for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008 despite a two percent increase in Alberta's population. The coalition is expecting a further reduction in consumption following the implementation of next week's ban on retail displays (powerwalls) and the removal of tobacco sales from pharmacies at the end of the year.

The *Tobacco Reduction Act* requires retailers to cover up their tobacco products by July 1, 2008. Establishments containing pharmacies, healthcare facilities, and post-secondary institutions will be required to stop selling any tobacco product by January 1, 2009.

"Powerwalls are one of the most important marketing tools available to the tobacco industry," said Les Hagen of Action on Smoking and Health. "The removal of tobacco displays will prevent tobacco companies from targeting kids in thousands of retail establishments throughout the province. These ominous displays are intended to stimulate impulse sales and to help create a positive image for a product that kills 3,000 Albertans each year. The powerwall ban is an important step toward improving the quality of life of Albertans."

Last year, the tobacco industry provided Canadian retailers with over \$100 million to display their products. Marketing research reveals that point-of-sale promotions increase tobacco sales by 12 to 28 percent.

Twelve provinces and territories have passed legislation to prohibit tobacco powerwalls. Nine provinces and territories have banned tobacco sales in all establishments containing pharmacies.

The coalition believes that the removal of powerwalls will not have any significant long-term impact on smaller retailers, such as convenience stores and gas stations. Based on the experience of other provinces, any loss of revenue resulting from a powerwall ban will be offset by increased traffic due to tobacco sales bans in pharmacies and supermarkets with

pharmacies. The coalition is comfortable with this shift since it will result in an overall net sales reduction of tobacco products.

"The provincial government is implementing this legislation in a very responsible manner that will minimize the impact on convenience stores and smaller retailers" said Hagen. "Alberta is the first province to couple a powerwall ban with a ban on tobacco sales in pharmacies. Any short-term losses among small retailers resulting from the powerwall ban will be offset by increased retail traffic when the pharmacy sales ban takes effect in January."

Tobacco is the leading avoidable cause of premature death and is responsible for one in every five fatalities in Alberta.

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