

campaign for a **smoke-free** alberta

- NEWS RELEASE -

EMBARGO UNTIL 6:00 A.M., MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2006

HEALTH GROUPS CALL FOR TOBACCO TAX INCREASE TO CURB INCREASED SALES

Alberta tobacco shipments have increased for the third consecutive year according to new data obtained from Alberta Finance.

The Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta is alarmed by this trend and is calling for an immediate tobacco tax increase to stem the sales increase and to reduce youth tobacco use.

The health coalition believes that tobacco company price discounts, combined with Alberta's sizzling economy, have increased the affordability of tobacco products especially among young people.

"We cannot allow tobacco companies to target young Albertans with price discounts" said Lorie Boychuk of the Canadian Cancer Society—Alberta/NWT Division. "Evidence shows that young people are particularly sensitive to tobacco pricing and Alberta's boom may be contributing to increased sales by making cigarettes more affordable. We cannot allow tobacco companies or our booming economy to undermine public health in Alberta. We urge the Alberta government to increase tobacco taxes immediately to stop this disturbing trend in its tracks".

In July, Health Canada released new survey data revealing that there were 8,000 new teen smokers in Alberta in 2005 compared to 2004. Half of these young people will ultimately die from tobacco use if their addiction goes unchecked.

The coalition is also concerned that the Alberta government may not be able to meet its performance targets for reducing tobacco use without further tax increases and other effective policy measures.

"The Alberta government has committed to reducing its 10-year tobacco sales by 50 percent by the year 2010" said Dr. Charl Els of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. "However the province is in grave danger of not meeting this commendable target without taking immediate action on tobacco taxation. The current sales trend is putting the entire tobacco reduction strategy in jeopardy. More importantly, this trend may condemn thousands of young Albertans to a long-term addiction that will significantly reduce their quality of life and their lifespan".

Overall tobacco shipments were up by 2.6 percent in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006 and by 4.6 percent and 3.3 percent in the two previous years, respectively. The total tobacco sales increase since 2003 is 11 percent.

Six of the eight leadership candidates have agreed to increase tobacco taxes if elected Premier. To date, Ed Stelmach and Ted Morton have not responded to the coalition's survey of effective measures to reduce tobacco use in Alberta. The remaining candidates responded favourably.

"While it's reassuring to know that most of the leadership candidates support a tobacco tax increase, we urge the Alberta government to act immediately" Boychuk emphasized. "The longer the government waits, the more teens will become addicted by falling prey to tobacco industry price discounts."

The chart below provides the tobacco shipment data for each of the last five years as well the performance target for 2011.

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CONTACT:

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MEDIA AVAILABILITY:

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Monday, November 6
Canadian Cancer Society – Calgary Region Office
2nd Floor, 205 - 12 Avenue S.E.

Please call Lorie Boychuk or Les Hagen to confirm in advance

