

CONTRABAND SMOKES – KIDS CAN GET THEM ANYWHERE

Toronto – According to the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco (OCAT), more than 60,000 Ontario students (Grade 7-12) who already smoke are reportedly now smoking contraband cigarettes.*

Founding Agencies

Canadian Cancer Society
Ontario Division

Heart and Stroke
Foundation of Ontario

Non-Smokers'
Rights Association

Ontario Lung Association

Ontario Medical Association

Supporting Agencies

Association of Local
Public Health Agencies

Cancer Care Ontario

Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

Ontario Association of
Naturopathic Doctors

Ontario Federation of Home
and School Associations

Ontario Physical and Health
Education Association

Ontario Public Health
Association

Physicians for a
Smoke-Free Canada

Registered Nurses
Association of Ontario

The Ontario College
of Family Physicians

“This is a conservative estimate,” said Dr. Marco Di Buono, Director of Research at the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario. “Most smokers start before the age of 20. For those who stay addicted long-term, about half die from the health effects of cigarette smoking. If we can prevent kids from starting or continuing to smoke cheap cigarettes, our chances of a smoke-free generation increase dramatically.”

Contraband cigarettes include First Nations-made clear plastic bags (baggies) of 200 cigarettes or packaged brands such as DKs or Sago, or tax-free legal brands made off-reserve.

“All it takes is a couple of phone calls to find someone selling contraband from the trunk of their car. At \$15-20 for a bag of 200 cigarettes, they're cheap. It's terrible, because cost is one of the top reasons why youth quit smoking. With contraband, there is no incentive to quit and so easy for kids to start,” said Emily Butko, an Ontario teen representing the Ontario Lung Association.

OCAT is made up of the Canadian Cancer Society – Ontario Division, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, the Non-Smokers' Rights Association, the Ontario Lung Association and the Ontario Medical Association.

The Campaign is calling on the provincial government to address the contraband issue as follows:

- Provide municipal police forces across Ontario with additional resources to enforce restrictions on contraband;
- Prohibit the supply of raw materials to unlicensed cigarette manufacturers;
- Reform the provincial quota system under which products from Canadian tobacco companies are supplied tax-free to First Nations. Some of this tax-free quota is now resold to non-First Nations Ontarians;
- Require a health-based marking on every individual cigarette sold in Ontario (the toll-free number of the Canadian Cancer Society's Smokers Helpline, for example).

“The Government of Quebec has enacted expanded powers for police and made supplying raw leaf tobacco to unlicensed manufacturers illegal. Saskatchewan has limited the legal brands supplied tax-free to reserves. Ontario must move in these same directions,” said Michael Perley, OCAT Director.

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“The increasing availability of contraband is undermining doctors’ years of work on tobacco control,” said Dr. Suzanne Strasberg, President of the Ontario Medical Association. “We don’t want someone selling cigarette baggies to our kids, or to our adult patients.”

“Our volunteers and staff are very concerned about this issue. The Canadian Cancer Society in Ontario will expand its anti-contraband efforts at the community level in the months ahead, to help get the message across that our kids must be protected,” said Rowena Pinto, Senior Director, Public Affairs.

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* Source: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, 2009