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**ash.ca** is a bimonthly newsletter of **Action on Smoking & Health**. ASH is Western Canada's leading health organization devoted to tobacco control and prevention. If you would like to become a member or need more information please visit our website **www.ash.ca** or contact our office at the address below.

## ➤ Editor's Note

This edition of ash.ca profiles dramatic reductions in tobacco consumption in Alberta and Canada. The declines are almost certainly the result of tobacco tax increases in every province in 2002. Alberta played a pivotal role in sparking this round of tax increases. Now the bad news. The Alberta Government failed to introduce comprehensive tobacco control legislation in the fall session of the Legislature. Fortunately, Alberta health groups remain committed to achieving this objective.

## ➤ Alberta cigarette consumption plunges by 21%

According to data supplied by Alberta Revenue, per-capita cigarette consumption in Alberta plummeted by 21% year-over-year during the second fiscal quarter of 2002.

ASH attributes last spring's tobacco tax increase—the largest dollar increase ever recorded globally—for the dramatic decline in tobacco consumption. On March 20, Alberta cigarette taxes were boosted by \$2.25 per pack of 25 cigarettes, representing an increase of about 30% on the retail price of cigarettes.

According to Les Hagen, ASH's executive director, "A consumption decline of this magnitude is almost unheard of and it proves that tobacco taxes can be instrumental in reducing and preventing tobacco use".

Despite the encouraging numbers, ASH believes that there could be some relapse among smokers who have quit as the result of the tax increase. According to published evidence, it usually takes

about 12 months for smoking rates to stabilize after a price increase.

When the tax increase was announced last March, ASH projected that per-capita consumption would drop by 10-14% and that youth consumption would decline by up to 40%. These projections were based on established price and demand formulas.

## ➤ Cigarette consumption down across Canada

Recent data released by Statistics Canada in January has revealed that tobacco consumption declined by 9% across Canada in 2002. This data marks one of the largest single-year consumption declines on record. The tobacco industry shipped 42.3 billion cigarette equivalents in 2002 compared with 46.1 in 2001.

Health groups are attributing this reduction to tobacco tax increases, stronger health warnings on cigarettes, further restrictions on tobacco sales and marketing, and various smoking bans across the country.

## ➤ Tobacco bill goes down in flames

Despite health minister Gary Mar's valiant attempt, efforts to obtain comprehensive tobacco legislation went down in flames during the fall session of the legislation.

According to Tom Olson, Alberta bureau chief for Southam newspapers, Premier Ralph Klein railed against the proposed legislation for fear of losing votes among rural smokers.

"It would be unacceptable for the Premier to value votes over the lives of Albertans" said Dr. Roger Hodgkinson, ASH chairman. "Premier Klein promised to implement all of the recommendations of the Mazankowski report and we expect him to keep his word".

***"We will accept all of the recommendations in the Mazankowski report... and we will use whatever regulatory power we require to bring about these changes."***

Premier Ralph Klein  
Montreal Gazette • January 23, 2002

The Mazankowski report called on the Alberta government to adopt comprehensive tobacco legislation as part of a broad recommendation to improve the health of Albertans.

According to news reports, the proposed bill would have:

- banned smoking in public establishments and workplaces,
- prohibited retail tobacco displays and promotions, and
- removed tobacco products from pharmacies.

The Alberta Campaign for Action on Tobacco held a news conference in October urging the government to keep its promise by adopting comprehensive tobacco legislation.

As of the date of writing, the Alberta government appears to have no plans to honor this commitment. However, health groups have vowed to keep up the pressure.

## ➤ Ban on youth tobacco possession draws fire

A provincial ban on youth tobacco possession has drawn fire from various health groups across the country, including the national Non-Smokers' Rights Association.

In a recent editorial, the NSRA's executive director Gar Mahood called the ban a gift for the tobacco companies that will reinforce the industry's promotion of tobacco use as a rite of passage into adulthood.

Mahood believes that the ban is unenforceable and will be mocked by teenagers who will continue to smoke in defiance of the ban. According to Mahood, there is no convincing evidence to show that youth possession bans will reduce teen smoking.

Health groups feel that this bill was largely a public relations gesture by the Alberta government for its failure to produce comprehensive tobacco control legislation.

The ban on youth possession will take effect on April 1. Minors under the age of 18 who are caught with cigarettes will face fines of up to \$100.

## ➤ Ottawa waitress champions the fight for smoke-free workplaces

As a life-long non-smoker, 56 year-old Ottawa waitress Heather Crowe was shocked to be diagnosed with lung cancer after a chest x-ray last fall.

After sharing the shocking news with one of her regular restaurant patrons, Health Canada was prompted to make Heather's story the subject of a national media campaign. The patron was Dan Micholls, a top official at Health Canada who oversees the federal tobacco control program.

Heather was compelled to file a Worker's Compensation Board claim since her illness

was work-related. The Ontario WCB accepted her claim just a few days before the television campaign was launched, resulting in tremendous national news coverage.

Over the past several months, Heather has been working tirelessly to encourage legislators across the country to ban smoking in the workplace. Heather has written to every labour minister in the country urging provincial governments to act. She has also met with numerous municipal councils and she convinced Winnipeg city council to ban smoking in

all public establishments and workplaces.

Thanks to Heather's courageous efforts, nonsmokers across the country may soon breathe a little easier. As she puts it, "I want to be the last person that dies of this".

To view Heather's campaign, visit:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/tobacco/facts/blueribbon/heather.html>

## ➤ Medical health officer takes his job seriously

An Ontario medical health officer is using broad powers under existing public health rules to ban smoking in all workplaces throughout his health region. Dr. Peter Sarsfield has ordered a region wide smoking ban in Ontario's Northwestern Health Region based in Kenora. Sarsfield decided to make the move after 17 out of 19 municipal councils in his region refused to pass bylaws to prohibit smoking in public establishments and workplaces.

Reaction to Sarsfield's decision varied widely among Alberta's medical health officers.

Edmonton's deputy medical officer Karen Lee said Capital Health has no plans to follow Sarsfield's lead. Lee's remarks drew fire from Ottawa-based Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada who charged that a hands-off approach could lead to lawsuits resulting from negligence and dereliction of duty.

In contrast, Calgary's medical health officer, Dr. Brent Friesen, said that he would be watching the Ontario decision closely to see if it has any implications for Alberta. Friesen is intervening in the implementation of the new Calgary smoking bylaw to ensure that designated smoking rooms meet public health requirements.

## ➤ Lung cancer victim inspires thousands

After being diagnosed with terminal lung cancer last fall, Barb Tarbox decided that she could not become another silent statistic. Instead, the Edmonton mother and former model felt compelled to share her heartbreaking story with school children to discourage them from following in her footsteps.

At first, she had her sights set on reaching 1,000 young people. That target soon changed after Barb drew national media attention for her courageous efforts. Barb was then approached by AADAC to appear on television commercials that followed her plight. Since last October, Barb has shared her story with over 30,000 students across the country and millions of Canadians have watched her campaign unfold in the media.

Health Minister Anne McLellan recently invited Tarbox to Ottawa where the House of Commons met her with a standing ovation. Prime Minister Jean Chretien also met with Barb and thanked her for her courageous efforts to discourage tobacco use.

The National Film Board is producing a documentary on Barb and a production company that chronicled the plight of Sue Rodriguez has approached her with a similar program in mind.

Despite her condition, Barb has vowed to keep spreading the message as long as she is able. Judging by her success to date, she will continue to inspire others for many years to come.

To view Barb's ads, visit [www.barbtarbox.com](http://www.barbtarbox.com)

## ➤ Edmonton mayor calls for complete smoking ban

Edmonton mayor Bill Smith has called for a complete smoking ban in all public establishments in the city. At a recent meeting of the Community Services Committee, Mayor Smith championed a motion to ban smoking in all public establishments effective July 1, 2003 with the exception of licensed gaming facilities. Smith wants to give bingos and casinos an additional two years to comply with the bylaw.

The committee approved Smith's motion and the city administration has been instructed to draft a proposed bylaw that reflects the motion. The bylaw will be presented to the committee on

March 20 before going to City Council for final approval. If approved, the proposed bylaw would establish a new benchmark for Alberta.

Meanwhile, a move to implement a complete smoking ban in the Alberta Capital Region failed due to a lack of unanimous support from its 22 member municipalities. However the cities of St. Albert, Spruce Grove, and Fort Saskatchewan are considering following Edmonton's lead. On March 21, Strathcona County (including Sherwood Park) will begin a two-year phased-in ban on smoking in all public establishments.

## ➤ Union boss calls for provincial ban on workplace smoking

The president of Alberta's largest union is urging the Klein government to ban smoking in all workplaces throughout the province. Dan McLennan of Alberta Union of Public Employees doesn't think that anyone should be exposed to secondhand smoke on the job and he wants the Alberta government to act immediately.

"The evidence that second-hand smoke is harmful is overwhelming," McLellan stated in a recent media interview.

"There should be no more smoking in provincial facilities, regardless of their purpose."

Calling on the province to show some leadership in creating smoke-free workplaces, McLennan wants the issue dealt with in 2003.

The Alberta Union of Public Employees represents over 50,000 public sector workers throughout the province.

## ➤ ASH moves downtown

On January 1, ASH moved into a new office in the historic Empire Building in downtown Edmonton. The building is conveniently situated between the Legislature and City Hall and is connected to the Edmonton LRT Central Station. The office will improve the efficiency and capacity of the organization. **Our new address is: Suite 1101, 10080 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton T5J 1V9. Our new phone number is 780-426-7867.**

## ➤ ASH makes waves at tobacco control conferences

ASH recently took part in two major tobacco control conferences held in San Francisco and Ottawa last fall. Executive director Les Hagen delivered several presentations at the conferences that profiled recent achievements in tobacco control in Alberta.

In a presentation titled "Achieving the world's largest tobacco tax increase in Canada's Marlboro Country", Hagen described the multi-year campaign to raise tobacco taxes in Alberta. As stated

in the presentation, the tax increase was particularly gratifying considering that the Alberta government maintains the lowest overall taxes in Canada and remains the only province without a provincial sales tax.

Hagen delivered another presentation that revealed the exploits of the tobacco lobby in Alberta. The speech revealed a sophisticated multi-pronged strategy to undermine tobacco control in Alberta. The strategy involves covert lobbying,

specious front groups, unholy alliances with hospitality and retail trade groups, dubious public relations tactics, and deliberate misinformation campaigns.

The San Francisco conference attracted over 3,000 delegates from across North America and the Ottawa conference drew several hundred Canadian delegates.

### Help ASH build a smoke-free future.

Your contribution is welcome.

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