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➤ Feds approve world's strongest health warnings

Tobacco companies launch legal challenge

Canadian tobacco companies will receive a well-deserved Christmas present this year when the world's strongest health warnings take effect in late December. After conducting extensive research, consultation, and public hearings, the federal government approved new full-colour warnings that occupy 50 percent of the package front and back. Sixteen different hard-hitting warnings will appear on cigarette packages complete with striking pictures depicting diseased lungs, hearts, and gums.

The new health warnings have received acclaim from health organizations around the world. The proposed Canadian health warnings appeared on the front cover of

the winter edition of Tobacco Control, the principal international journal on tobacco reduction.

ASH testified in support of the new health warnings before the House of Commons Standing Policy Committee on Health in early June. In its presentation, ASH emphasized that when communicating the hazards of smoking, there is no better medium than the package itself. Approximately 2 billion cigarette packages are sold annually in Canada.

As predicted, Canada's three major tobacco companies have launched a joint court action in an attempt to block the health warnings. The case will be heard in early August in Quebec Superior Court.

➤ Tobacco executives forced to testify at Senate hearings

Two companies pledge to support Bill S-20

In a historic and ground-breaking display, the chief executives of Canada's three largest tobacco companies—Imperial Tobacco; JTI-Macdonald; and Rothmans, Benson and Hedges—were recently forced to testify at Senate hearings on proposed tobacco legislation. Two of the three tobacco executives surprised observers by publicly pledging

their company's support to Bill S-20, the Tobacco Youth Prevention Act.

Responding to tough questions from Senators, the tobacco executives also made guarded admissions about the health risks of tobacco use.

Bob Bexon, the president of Imperial Tobacco—Canada's largest tobacco company—admitted under oath "On the weight of the evidence that's before us today, we would agree that cigarette

smoking causes disease in some people." Bexon also admitted that the three executives were carefully coached by their lawyers prior to the hearings.

Senator Colin Kenny, the sponsor of Bill S-20, expressed scepticism with the endorsement of the tobacco companies stating "We'll have to see whether their actions match their words over time".

The debate on Bill S-20 will resume in the fall sitting of Parliament.

➤ Cochrane restaurants will be smoke-free by October 1

Court orders town to ban smoking in restaurants

The Alberta Court of Queen's Bench has ordered the Town of Cochrane to comply with a successful plebiscite calling for a smoking ban in local restaurants where minors are allowed. Town Council refused to abide by the outcome of a binding vote delivered in an October 1998 plebiscite, even though 60 percent of residents voted in favour of a smoke-free restaurant bylaw.

Frustrated with Town Council's indifference, local resident and ASH member Jerry Jankiewicz decided to launch a legal action that would force the town to abide by the original plebiscite. In the meantime, Council approved another plebiscite that broadened the scope of the bylaw to include bars and taverns. The second plebiscite was narrowly defeated in October 1999 by Cochrane restaurants.

Cochrane Town Council has agreed to comply with the court order and recently passed a bylaw that will take effect on October 1. Cochrane will become the fifth Alberta municipality to ban smoking in restaurants, following the lead of Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, Magrath, and Taber.

➤ Taber smoking ban takes effect

Taber celebrated Canada Day 2000 with a smoking ban in all public areas accessible to minors. Taber is the fourth Alberta municipality to ban smoking in restaurants and other public areas.

According to town manager, Ken Mundy, several businesses decided to ban smoking prior to the deadline in grateful anticipation of the bylaw.

The implementation of the bylaw was accompanied by a positive editorial by the Taber Times stating "It will be up to all of us to make the bylaw work properly. All it will require is that we respect the rights of others to breathe freely as recognized in the bylaw." Taber's smoking regulation is modelled after the highly successful Lethbridge bylaw.

➤ **ASH nominates former Alberta Speaker to ATRA Board**

Stan Schumacher, a former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and Honorary Patron of ASH, has been elected to the board of directors of the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Alliance.

Mr. Schumacher has a long track record of public service including three successive terms as a Member of Parliament and as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. During his tenure as an MLA, Mr. Schumacher sponsored several private member's bills to restrict tobacco sales and marketing in Alberta.

From 1993 to 1997, Mr. Schumacher served as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and oversaw the introduction of several parliamentary reforms, including the loosening of restrictions on private member's legislation. Two private member's bills regulating tobacco use have been passed since these reforms were introduced.

In his nomination letter, ASH Honorary Chairman Dr. Roger Hodgkinson stated "Mr. Schumacher's outstanding credentials reflect a strong commitment to public service and we feel that ATRA would be very well served by his participation. We are very proud to have recruited an individual of Mr. Schumacher's calibre, standing, and experience".

➤ **Edmonton shopping malls ban smoking**

West Edmonton Mall refuses to go smoke-free

Edmonton shoppers can breathe easier on August 1 when 11 local malls ban smoking on their premises. The policy will ban smoking in all common areas including food courts but stops short of banning smoking in enclosed restaurants operating in the malls.

However the world's largest shopping centre, West Edmonton Mall, will continue to allow smoking in its food courts. WEM vice-president Howard Anson said that he'll await the outcome of City Council's review of the smoking bylaw in October before deciding on a complete ban. Edmonton Centre and Eaton Centre will also continue to allow smoking in their food courts.

In announcing the coordinated ban, Paul Fairbridge of Southgate Centre stated "We're simply recognizing that second-hand smoke presents a potential health hazard for smokers and nonsmokers. The intent of this effort is in the common good of everyone".

The Edmonton ban follows a similar move by Calgary shopping malls last summer.

➤ **WCB holds public hearings on proposed B.C. smoking ban**

Following a court ruling that struck down the short-lived smoking ban in restaurants and bars, the B.C. Workers' Compensation Board has decided to hold another round of public hearings to determine the fate of smoking in eating and drinking establishments.

Last March, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled that the WCB did not conduct adequate consultations with the hospitality industry prior to implementing its Occupational Health and Safety regulation banning smoking in restaurants and bars. Rather than appeal the ruling, the WCB held another round of consultations around the province in June.

A decision on the outcome of the public hearings is expected this fall.

➤ Action Alert: Keep up the pressure on Bill S-20

In our last newsletter, we asked members to write to Senators in support of Bill S-20, the Tobacco Youth Protection Act. Thanks in part to your efforts, Bill S-20 passed second reading (approval in principal) in the Senate.

Once the bill receives final approval in the Senate (a virtual certainty), it will then be introduced in the House of Commons and debated by Members of Parliament. Therefore we are urging supporters to write to MPs expressing your support for the bill.

To recap, Bill S-20 has the potential to transform Canada's current tobacco reduction effort by providing adequate funding for an effective, evidence-based strategy. The \$1.50 per carton levy will place Canada's per-capita funding on par with that of California and Massachusetts. The foundation created by Bill S-20 will run at arms-length to government to prevent any political interference.

You can help to get this bill passed by writing to your Member of Parliament at the following address:

House of Commons Ottawa ON K1A 0A4. No postage is required.

If you don't know who your MP is, call 1-800-622-6232 or visit the following website:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/36/sm-mpcur-e.htm>

In your letter, please relay the following:

- Your concern about tobacco use, especially among youth.
- The need for an adequate investment in strategies that work.
- Your support of Bill S-20, the Tobacco Youth Protection Act.

For more details on Bill S-20, please visit Senator Kenny at <http://www.sen.parl.gc.ca/ckenny>

Please share this information with others who want to protect our youth from tobacco.

➤ Alberta cities exploring smoke-free bylaws

The cities of Edmonton, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, and Medicine Hat are reviewing further restrictions on smoking in restaurants and other public areas following the lead of Lethbridge earlier this year.

On January 1, Lethbridge became the first Alberta city to ban smoking in all public areas where children are allowed, including restaurants. The towns of Pincher Creek and Magrath approved identical bylaws that also took effect on January 1.

The implementation of the Lethbridge bylaw has been "amazingly successful" according to Dr. Paul Hasselback, the Medical Officer of Health for the Chinook Health Region. Local businesses have been very cooperative with no charges or fines issued to date.