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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](http://www.ash.ca) or contact our office at the address below.

## a Editor's Note

This edition of ash.ca profiles the start of a new era for tobacco reduction in Alberta. Alberta's world-precedent-setting tobacco tax increase and the new Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy have dramatically changed the landscape. The Alberta tax increase is having a ripple effect across the country, with a total of seven provinces approving tobacco tax hikes in 2002 (and counting). Although provincial tobacco legislation remains "under review", ASH would like to acknowledge the recent progress that has been made. We remain optimistic that further gains are possible.

## a Alberta tax increase largest ever recorded

The Alberta government raised tobacco taxes by a whopping \$2.25 per 25-pack or 129% percent in the March 19 provincial budget. Taxes on smokeless tobacco and cigars were also raised to equalize tax rates on all tobacco products. According to global experts, Alberta's increase is the largest absolute tobacco tax hike ever recorded and it is expected to have a dramatic effect on tobacco consumption in the province.

ASH called the tax increase an "historic public health achievement" and predicted that it will result in 40,000 fewer smokers and up to a 40% decline in youth consumption. Current evidence indicates that every

10% increase in the price of cigarettes will reduce adult consumption by 3-4% and youth consumption by 6-12%.

Alberta's tax increase helped to trigger a wave of provincial tobacco tax increases across Canada that is effectively reversing the 1994 tax rollbacks. Seven provinces have increased their tobacco taxes so far this year with Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick still considering tax hikes.

The Alberta tax increase has created a surge in the sale of stop-smoking products with some pharmacists reporting a five-fold increase in the sale of nicotine patches.

## a New tobacco reduction strategy launched

On March 22, Alberta health minister Gary Mar and AADAC chair Leroy Johnson unveiled a new multi-million-dollar provincial tobacco reduction strategy at a Calgary press conference. The strategy commits \$11.7 million annually to a multi-pronged effort to reduce tobacco use that will include mass media

campaigns, prevention and cessation programs, competitive grants, and anti-smuggling enforcement. With this new strategy, Alberta's per-capita investment in tobacco reduction is now the highest in the country.

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An internal government report that was completed last June by the Interdepartmental Committee on Tobacco Reduction was also released at the press conference. The report contains 24 recommendations for reducing tobacco use, including:

- Investing \$19 million annually in a provincial tobacco reduction strategy
- Launching a provincial mass media public education campaign
- Setting up a toll-free provincial stop-smoking hotline
- Mandatory smoking prevention education in Alberta schools
- Tobacco tax increases and anti-smuggling measures
- Legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing
- Legislation to restrict smoking in public areas and workplaces

Most of the recommendations in the nine-month-old report are marked "accepted" or "accepted with revisions" by the Alberta government with the conspicuous exception of tobacco legislation, which is marked "under review".

AADAC will play the lead role in implementing the strategy, expanding its 50-year-old addictions mandate to include tobacco. The government agency has created a new tobacco reduction unit that is led by Lloyd Carr, who was the primary architect of the interdepartmental report.

For more information, visit [www.aadac.com/tobacco/index.asp](http://www.aadac.com/tobacco/index.asp)

## a Provincial health coalition pursues provincial legislation

The Alberta Campaign for Action on Tobacco (ACAT), a new coalition of nine prominent health organizations, recently launched communication campaign calling for provincial tobacco control legislation. The campaign includes publicity, direct mail, targeted advertising and other promotions designed to enlist the support of Albertans.

At a recent Edmonton news conference, ACAT spokesperson Dr. David Swann called for legislation that will protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke and will protect kids from tobacco industry marketing. In his remarks Swann stated, "Alberta is the only remaining province without any legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing. As the result, tobacco companies are getting a free ride in Alberta when compared with

other provinces". He added, "There is no need to protect a non-resident industry whose products kill 3,400 Albertans annually".

ACAT has developed a set of evidence-based legislative recommendations that closely reflect those of the Interdepartmental Committee on Tobacco Reduction. If fully adopted, these recommendations would make Alberta a national leader in tobacco reduction. More importantly, the resulting legislation would have a profound impact on tobacco use in Alberta.

To help enlist public support, ACAT has created a new website that allows visitors send a message directly to their MLA.

For more information, visit [www.smokefreealberta.com](http://www.smokefreealberta.com).

## a Provincial tobacco bill delayed

Gary Mar's efforts to introduce a tobacco bill in the spring session of the Alberta legislature were stymied by resistance among Tory MLAs, according to a recent headline story in the Edmonton Journal. The story suggests that some MLAs think that the health minister's proposals go too far and unfairly step on the rights of smokers and businesses. Mar is reportedly under pressure to water down a proposed blanket ban on smoking in public places and restricting places where cigarettes can be sold.

The story reports that the opposition to the bill is coming from MLAs who feel that the bill will restrict individuals' rights and unfairly targets smokers

affected by the recent tobacco tax increase. After approving a \$2.25 increase on cigarettes, some MLAs feel it is inappropriate to resume the "attack" so quickly.

Premier Klein is among those who have expressed opposition to the proposed bill. At the annual Tory convention in March, Klein publicly questioned Mar's apparent intentions to ban smoking in all public areas, including bars and taverns.

Despite the delay, Gary Mar is reported to have his sights set on introducing a tobacco bill in the fall session of the Legislature.

## a **Strathcona County considers 100% smoke-free bylaw**

Strathcona County may become the first Alberta municipality to adopt a 100% smoke-free bylaw if local activist Linda Osinchuk has it her way. Osinchuk has led a local campaign urging county residents to support a complete smoking ban in workplaces and public establishments. And it appears that her efforts may pay off.

On May 27, county council gave first and second reading to what could become Alberta's gold-standard smoking bylaw. Two very civil public hearings were held on May 6 and 8 and a final vote on the bylaw is expected by July.

At the hearings, councillors were urged not to follow Edmonton's example of allowing some businesses to allow smoking if they prohibit children or set up a "loophole lounge". Presenters provided listings of dozens of Canadian communities that have passed 100% smoke-free bylaws including Victoria, Vancouver, Burnaby, Surrey, Kingston and Ottawa. Councillors were also provided with recently published reports documenting the positive economic impact of smoking bans in Victoria and Ottawa.

If Strathcona County adopts the bylaw, it is expected to have a positive effect on neighbouring Edmonton when city council reviews its bylaw this summer. Edmonton Mayor Bill Smith has stated that he would like to see a region-wide bylaw that would reflect the proposed Strathcona County bylaw.

## a **BC Government backs off on smoking ban**

The Campbell government has decided to back off on a province-wide smoking ban in restaurants and bars. On May 1, new smoking regulations took effect that allow smoking in restaurants and bars provided that a designated smoking room is created. The smoking room can occupy up to 45% of the floor space of an establishment and patrons are allowed to dine and drink in the room.

Health groups criticized the move as a setback for public health that will continue to jeopardize the health of hospitality workers who are required to serve patrons in the smoking rooms.

Fortunately, the new smoking rules will not affect municipalities that have already banned smoking in restaurants and bars such as greater Vancouver and greater Victoria.

## a **ASH blows whistle on tobacco lobbyist**

ASH recently received a leaked tobacco industry memo revealing a devious plot to undermine the Alberta government's new tobacco reduction strategy. The memo was written by Jock Osler of Osler Communications in Calgary, the tobacco industry's primary lobbyist in Alberta. Osler is a veteran Tory organizer with close ties to federal PC leader Joe Clark. He is also the former chair of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts—an Alberta government foundation that frequently co-sponsors cultural events with tobacco companies.

The memo reveals an underhanded campaign to fight the tobacco strategy including urging tobacco retailers to pressure MLAs to oppose the initiative. The memo also reveals Osler's role in the campaign as the chair of the Alberta Committee for Responsible Tobacco Retailing, a tobacco industry front group. Osler lists several "unsettling highlights" about the strategy, including recommendations to "Prohibit youth under 18 from using, selling, or possessing tobacco" and to "Prohibit...starter products".

"This incredibly damning document reveals the disturbing lengths to which the tobacco industry will go to undermine public health in Alberta", said Les Hagen, executive director of ASH. "The tobacco companies know that they have very little credibility and that's why they are getting retailers to do their dirty work for them", he added. "The fact that the memo's author finds the government's plans to reduce youth smoking 'unsettling' reveals the industry's true motivation when it comes to children" he added.

To view the leaked memo, visit [www.ash.ca/jock](http://www.ash.ca/jock)

## a McLellan light and mild on tobacco?

Four months into Anne McLellan's mandate as federal Health Minister, her intentions on tobacco reduction remain in question by Canadian health organizations. McLellan's only significant media profile on tobacco to date focused on her intentions to slow down Allan Rock's attempts to ban light and mild descriptors on cigarettes.

According to media reports, Anne McLellan is now reviewing whether any

action is required to stop the tobacco industry's deception of consumers through its use of light and mild descriptors. This news follows the release of a major report calling for a ban on light and mild cigarettes that was prepared by the Minister's own national advisory committee on tobacco control.

To add fuel to the fire, a recent quarterly financial report released by

Imperial Tobacco stated, "In the first quarter of 2002, the new Health Minister declared her intention to postpone the removal of these descriptors pending further evaluation". In a letter to the Minister, Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada asked McLellan clarify if she has made any such formal declaration to the tobacco giant. To date, the Minister has provided no explanation.

## a Calgary City Council stalls again

The Calgary smoking bylaw soap opera continues to frustrate local health groups who were hoping for a favourable decision at the May 6 city council meeting. At the meeting, Council was to consider a report and recommendations that were prepared by a multi-stakeholder committee that it struck last year. However despite spending \$40,000 on the committee's report, Council decided to table the report in favour of more consultation with affected businesses.

The Canadian Restaurant and Food Association and several Alberta hospitality groups staged a last-minute attempt to push the bylaw off the rails. CRFA purchased full-page newspaper ads and sent packages to its Calgary members urging restaurants to call their alderman in opposition to the proposed bylaw. Not surprisingly, the restaurant association has been linked directly to the tobacco lobby in recently released industry documents.

"It's very disappointed that council was swayed by this last-minute lobbying", said Tanya Grierson of the Calgary Tobacco Reduction Action Coalition (CTRAC). Grierson was CTRAC's representative on the multi-stakeholder smoking bylaw committee.

The proposed bylaw is scheduled to return to city council September 30 for discussion.

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

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