

Health Minister calls for provincial tobacco strategy • Alberta Government fails to meet tobacco reduction targets • **Spruce Meadows dumps du Maurier** • Alberta Senator cops "fatal" confession from tobacco executive • **ASH participates in World Conference on Tobacco or Health** • NSRA hailed the world's most effective tobacco control organization • **Big Tobacco linked to candy cigarettes** • Recent quitters now qualify for ASH Group Insurance • **Help ASH build a smoke-free future**

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.

➤ Health Minister calls for provincial tobacco strategy

Alberta Health and Wellness Minister Gary Mar is calling for a comprehensive strategy to reduce tobacco use in the province. Mar wants the Alberta government to adopt a package of tobacco control measures that includes tobacco tax increases, smoking bans in public areas, tobacco sales restrictions, increased funding for prevention programs, and coverage for stop-smoking therapies. Mar's remarks came after ASH revealed that the Alberta government has failed to meet its own tobacco reduction targets.

"There are people criticizing us for not doing enough on the smoking issue and I

agree with them" Mar admitted in a recent media interview. "Right now and right away we'd like the number of Alberta smokers down to the national average of 25%", he added. "That's our target. When we meet our target it will be time to look at a better target, maybe 20%". Commenting on a recent meeting with ASH, Mar stated "Their goals and my goals are the same. I'd like to see a lot fewer people smoke in this province."

ASH is delighted with the Minister's public commitments and we hope that his statements will be backed up with effective and immediate government action.

➤ Alberta Government fails to meet tobacco reduction targets

ASH has revealed that the Alberta Government failed to meet its own tobacco reduction targets contained within its three-year business plan. The government planned to reduce the adult smoking rate from 28% in 1995/96 to 25% by 1998. However the latest survey conducted by Health Canada found that the Alberta smoking rate has dropped by only 1% since 1995/96. It was further revealed that the government has completely abandoned its key performance measure on tobacco use.

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"We are very alarmed with these results and we urge the Alberta government to make tobacco reduction a top priority" said Dr. Roger Hodkinson, Honorary Chairman. "It is disturbing to find that the government has completely abandoned its performance target on tobacco use" he added. "This action sends the message that the government is prepared to scrap its performance targets if it doesn't meet them"

ASH is urging the Alberta Government to commit to a comprehensive, evidence-based tobacco reduction strategy that is modeled after successful programs in the U.S. The states of California, Massachusetts, Florida, and Oregon have adopted well-funded, broad-based strategies that are producing excellent results. These strategies combine tobacco tax increases, legislation, and community and school-based programs with high-profile mass media campaigns to counter tobacco advertising.

➤ Spruce Meadows dumps du Maurier

Alberta's primary tobacco sponsorship vehicle—*Spruce Meadows*—recently ended its long-standing nicotine dependency by dumping du Maurier in favour of a new sponsor, Nortel Networks. The *Nortel Networks International* will replace the du Maurier International as the largest cash prize show jumping event in the world. Nortel has sweetened the pot by increasing the total prize purse from \$800,000 to \$1 million.

The decision to dump du Maurier was

driven by new federal tobacco sponsorship restrictions that will come into effect in 2001. Under the new Tobacco Act provisions, tobacco companies will not be able to sponsor events with a significant youth audience. For years, Spruce Meadows has allowed children under 12 to attend the du Maurier International for free and the event has been broadcast during youth viewing hours.

Critics of the new regulations have argued that tobacco-sponsored events will fold

without continued tobacco funding. However Calgary's Spruce Meadows joins a growing list of so-called tobacco-dependent events that have found alternative sponsors.

"This is a tremendous moment for us at Spruce Meadows, and for the sport of show jumping," said Spruce Meadows Co-Chairman, Ron Southern.

We couldn't agree more.

➤ Alberta Senator cops "fatal" confession from tobacco executive

Newly-appointed Alberta Senator Tommy Banks, an apologetic Camel smoker, copped an important confession from the CEO of Canada's largest tobacco company during the recent Senate hearings on Bill S-20 in Ottawa. Under tough cross-examination from Senator Banks, Imperial Tobacco president Bob Bexon confessed that smoking causes fatal lung disease.

Senator Banks asked Bexon "Do you believe that cigarettes cause fatal lung disease?" Bexon replied by admitting "Yes, I believe on the weight of the evidence today that cigarettes will cause fatal lung disease in some people." This confession could have important implications in future product liability suits involving smokers who have contracted fatal lung disease.

Bexon and two other tobacco company CEOs were forced to testify at the hearings under a rarely-used Senate subpoena after ignoring repeated requests to appear.

➤ **ASH participates in 11th World Conference on Tobacco or Health**

ASH honorary chairman Dr. Roger Hodgkinson, and executive director Les Hagen recently attended the 11th World Conference on Tobacco or Health in Chicago, Illinois. Sponsored by the World Health Organization, the event drew over 4,500 delegates from around the world who are involved with the global tobacco control movement.

At the conference, Hodgkinson and Hagen delivered a presentation titled "Cause-related marketing and tobacco control: A successful case study". The presentation profiled the success of the innovative ASH Group Insurance program in recruiting new members and raising funds for tobacco control. ASH received some great feedback on the presentation and forged new relationships with others who are involved with cause-related marketing.

One of the conference highlights was a heated open-microphone exchange between Dr. Hodgkinson and federal health minister Allan Rock over the federal government's tobacco control policy. Hodgkinson accused the minister of failing Canadians by not restoring tobacco taxes to pre-rollback levels and for not supporting Senator Colin Kenny's bill to create a national smoking prevention trust fund. The Minister responded by stating that he is "eager to make progress" on both issues. The exchange took place in front of an international audience at a conference session hosted by Allan Rock.

➤ **NSRA hailed the world's most effective tobacco control organization**

Canada's Non-Smokers' Rights Association was recognized as the world's most effective tobacco control organization at the recent 11th World Conference on Smoking and Health in Chicago, Illinois. The renowned Luther L. Terry Award, named after the late U.S. Surgeon General, is the world's most prestigious prize for leadership in tobacco control. The NSRA received the award for the category of outstanding organization.

Another renowned former Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop, presented the award to the NSRA's executive director, Gar Mahood. In receiving the award, Mahood thanked all of the individuals who have helped to make the organization successful as well as his mother, wife, and son who attended the ceremony. "The truth is that I am here representing a large team of dedicated, talented Canadian leaders both inside and outside our association, all of whom helped make this possible" said Mahood.

Canada is truly privileged to rely on the remarkable leadership of the NSRA.

➤ **Big Tobacco linked to candy cigarettes**

Internal tobacco industry documents have now confirmed that tobacco companies cooperated with the makers of candy cigarettes to promote smoking to children, according to a new study published by researchers at the University of Rochester Medical School in New York. The study found that some tobacco companies tolerated trademark infringement and granted confectioners permission to sell candy that used cigarette pack designs.

"While not earth-shattering to people who have observed the tobacco industry over the years, the fact that these conclusions are based on the industry's own words makes them compelling to policy-makers, the public and ... the courts," said professor Stanton Glantz of the University of California, San Francisco,

To view the full study, visit: <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/321/7257/362>

➤ Recent quitters now qualify for ASH Group Insurance

The pre-qualification period for the ASH Group Insurance program has been reduced from 24 months of continued smoking abstinence to just 12 months. This means that former smokers who have been smoke-free for at least 12 months now qualify for nonsmoker rates on their home and auto insurance. The change in the pre-qualification period was lowered on the basis of new research showing that smoking relapse varies little between 12 and 24 months.

"We are delighted to reward recent quitters with nonsmoker rates on their home and auto insurance" said Heather Rankin, vice-president of Willis Canada. "ASH Group Insurance is an innovative product that has produced significant savings for hundreds of nonsmokers" she added. "This change will make the program available to more consumers while rewarding people more quickly for adopting a lower-risk lifestyle".

"The health benefits of quitting are almost immediate and quitters reduce their risks substantially within the first 12 months of abstinence" said Christiaan Velthoen, president of ASH. "We want to reflect this reduced risk in the ASH Group Insurance program", he added. "We hope that this policy change will provide some additional incentive for smokers who want to quit."

To obtain an insurance quote, please call Willis Canada at 1-800-272-5688

➤ Help ASH build a smoke-free future. Your contribution is welcome.

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