

- NEWS RELEASE -

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Calgary fails indoor air quality tests

Calgary - A recent analysis of indoor air quality in 34 drinking establishments in Alberta's two largest cities reveals that Calgary's indoor air is 30 times more polluted than Edmonton's. The survey also revealed that Calgary's indoor air quality is much worse than outdoor pollution levels even during rush hour traffic based on counts of small airborne particles.

ASH is crediting Edmonton's public smoking ban, introduced last July, for the city's improved indoor air quality. The group measured indoor air quality in the same 13 Edmonton establishments before and after the city's smoking ban. The testing revealed a 20-fold improvement in Edmonton's indoor air quality after the smoking ban took effect.

"Are Calgarians willing to put up with indoor air quality that is 30 times worse than Edmonton's for another two years?" asked Robyn Hefferton, organizer of the Petition for a Smoke-Free Calgary. "City Council is sitting on its hands while Calgarians are being forced to breathe secondhand smoke in hundreds of public establishments. Protection delayed is protection denied. We urge Calgarians to call their aldermen and tell them to implement the smoking bylaw immediately. 2008 is too long to wait."

"The City of Calgary prides itself on its environment program and its efforts to improve outdoor air quality" said Les Hagen, executive director of ASH. "However we challenge the City's commitment to these initiatives if it is prepared to overlook the major threat that secondhand smoke poses to public health. Our testing reveals that indoor air quality is much worse than outdoor air quality as the result of secondhand smoke. Calgarians should not accept this harmful double-standard".

ASH visited 34 establishments in Calgary and Edmonton in September and October and measured airborne particles with the aid of a respirable particle counter. This sophisticated electronic device uses a built-in laser to count particles in the air that are less than 2.5 microns in size. Particles of this size are almost always the result of a combustion process such as burning tobacco. The device was tested and calibrated by Dycor Industries, an Edmonton firm that specializes in environmental and biohazard monitoring.

“We challenge City Council to make public health a priority by accelerating the implementation of the smoking bylaw” Hefferton added. “Why is City Council placing such a huge priority on climate change, idling and alternative fuels while stalling on a major health risk like secondhand smoke? Council needs to stop idling on the smoking bylaw and join the third millennium by making all public establishments smoke-free. This May, Calgary will become the last Canadian city of one million residents or more to allow smoking in public establishments if the smoking bylaw remains unchanged.”

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has classified secondhand smoke as a Group A, or known human, carcinogen. There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Hospitality workers face the highest exposure levels of any occupation. Health Canada estimates that at least 1,000 Canadians die annually from secondhand smoke.

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