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**NEW SMOKING LAWS TO TAKE EFFECT TOMORROW: CIGARETTE TAX TO INCREASE \$.25 TO \$2.24 PER PACK; SMOKING BANNED IN WORKPLACES**

*Coalition for a Tobacco Free Vermont Says Vermont's Tobacco Control Program is There to Help Smokers Who Want to Quit and Should Continue*

BURLINGTON, VT (June 30, 2009): With new laws taking effect tomorrow, July 1, 2009, the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Vermont today praised the state for completely banning workplace smoking and adding an additional \$.25 per pack cigarette tax increase. The two new laws strengthen Vermont's commitment to providing a healthier work environment for smokers and non-smokers and will help smokers who want to quit to take the next step.

"These two new acts will provide smokers a new incentive to quit once and for all," said Nicole Lukas, Advocacy Director for the American Heart Association. "Increasing tobacco taxes, implementing clean indoor air laws and providing a comprehensive tobacco control program are the three most effective ways to reduce the number one cause of preventable death – tobacco use," she said, noting that immediate health benefits from reducing tobacco use include reductions in heart attacks and strokes.

The per-pack cigarette tax of \$.25 comes on the heels of a federal tax increase of \$.62 on April 1, 2009. This means smokers in Vermont will begin paying almost one-dollar-per-pack more for cigarettes starting tomorrow. American Cancer Society Director of Government Relations and Advocacy Kelly Stoddard said the price increase puts Vermont on the right track but more work needs to be done to ensure that progress in reducing smoking rates continues.

"With the combination of state and federal tobacco tax increases going into effect this year there will be more Vermonters quitting than ever which will place an increased demand on cessation services. The need for adequate funding for our state Tobacco Control Program has never been greater," she said. Stoddard said that as a result of the Tobacco Control Program, adult smoking rates have dropped from 22.4% to 16.7%, but the program was cut by \$400,000 this year and Vermont is still spending \$233 million annually on tobacco-related illnesses.

American Lung Association Director of Health Promotion and Public Policy Rebecca Ryan said the Coalition will continue to urge Vermont legislators to adequately fund the Tobacco Control Program with Master Settlement funds in order to provide smokers with necessary resources to quit and address populations where smoking rates are high. "While we have made progress, currently,

25% of Vermont's 18-34 year olds smoke. Smoking isn't just unhealthy, it's a fiscal burden. Helping these young people to quit will prevent health care costs in the future both for the smokers themselves and Vermont taxpayers," said Ryan noting that the State is currently paying \$72 million on smoking-caused Medicaid spending.

"There are still 83,000 Vermonters who smoke and need help to quit," said Coalition Coordinator Tina Zuk. She said the Coalition hopes that some of these smokers will take a second look at the costs of smoking and determine now is the time to kick the habit. "There are numerous resources available to smokers through Vermont's Tobacco Control Program, including the Vermont Quit Network which Vermonters can access by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW or access on-line at [vtquitnetwork.org](http://vtquitnetwork.org)," said Zuk.

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