



Tuesday, June 27, 2006

CONTACT: Marge Larson
276-5864

U.S. Surgeon General Report Confirms Deadly Effects of Secondhand Smoke

Timely Report Reinforces the Critical Need for New Smokefree Ordinance

June 27, 2006, Anchorage, Alaska – Twenty years after the first U.S. Surgeon General's report on the dangers of secondhand smoke, the latest report issued today by the Surgeon General finds that secondhand smoke is even more dangerous than previously thought. The report highlights the immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system, as well as the causal relationship with heart disease and lung cancer.

In addition, the report found that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke – separation of smokers and nonsmokers, cleaning the air, and ventilating buildings cannot eliminate exposure. The report also reviewed research from the last twenty years regarding control of secondhand smoke exposure, including effectiveness of ordinances as well as impact on both public health and economics. The 2006 report found that “evidence from peer-reviewed studies shows that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse economic impact on the hospitality industry.”¹

U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop issued the landmark report *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Smoking, A Report of the Surgeon General* in 1986. The latest report issued today, entitled *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Secondhand Smoke*, confirms that secondhand smoke is responsible for tens of thousands of deaths annually in the United States from various causes including heart disease and lung cancer. In Alaska, secondhand smoke kills more people each year than motor vehicle accidents.² All of these deaths are needless and preventable.

“The latest Surgeon General's report leaves no question that secondhand smoke kills. It's time for the Anchorage Assembly to protect the fundamental right of all workers to breathe clean air on the job,” said Marge Larson, CEO of the American Lung Association of Alaska.

In Anchorage, many people remain at risk from exposure to secondhand smoke. Today's report from the nation's top public health official demonstrates the need for comprehensive laws to protect everyone from the deadly effects of secondhand smoke. Public policy needs to catch up with the conclusive science that shows that secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 toxic chemicals, including the toxins such as formaldehyde, arsenic and cyanide. Exposure to secondhand smoke causes heart disease and cancer in nonsmokers.

The Anchorage Assembly is now considering a Secondhand Smoke Control Ordinance, introduced by Assembly members Dan Coffey and Dick Traini. The ordinance would make all workplaces in Anchorage smokefree. Under current municipal law, workers not protected from secondhand smoke include workers in bars, taverns, bingo halls, pull tabs, and businesses with less than 4 employees.

Hundreds of local governments have already approved strong smokefree air laws along with 14 states including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii³, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Now is the time for Anchorage to clear the air of tobacco smoke.

¹ United States Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*

² Alaska Department of Health and Human Services. *Seeing It Through: Tobacco Prevention and Control in Alaska*. 2004 Annual Report

³ Hawaii's bill is currently awaiting the governor's signature. If signed, the bill will take effect November 16, 2006.