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Virginia Health Advocates Say New Surgeon General's Report on Secondhand Smoke Shows Need to Pass Comprehensive SmokeFree Workplace Law

Richmond, VA (June 27, 2006) – Virginia lawmakers and health advocates said a new U.S. Surgeon General's Report on secondhand smoke leaves absolutely no doubt why Virginia must enact a comprehensive smokefree law that covers all indoor workplaces.

"This report reaffirms that secondhand smoke is a hazard to anyone exposed to it," stated Senator Brandon Bell of Roanoke. "Virginia workers will continue to suffer its dire effects as long as the General Assembly refuses to pass smokefree air legislation."

The Surgeon General's report, released today in Washington, DC, shows that there is no longer any scientific debate that secondhand smoke causes serious diseases, including lung cancer, heart disease and other respiratory illnesses, such as bronchitis and asthma, and that the only way to protect everyone from these ailments is to eliminate exposure. The report declares that other methods, such as non-smoking sections and ventilation technology, do not eliminate secondhand smoke exposure.

"Virginians should welcome this report and demand that their legislators take action to protect them from toxic tobacco smog," said Professor James Repace, a secondhand smoke expert. He added, "In a recent air quality study in Virginia, we found that air in smoky restaurants, bars, bingo halls and bowling alleys was five times worse than air found in the Hampton Roads Tunnel and thirty times worse than air along clogged I-95."

This marks the first time the Surgeon General has issued a report on secondhand smoke since 1986. Materials on the Surgeon General's report can be found at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/.

Health advocates said the Surgeon General's report shows why the Virginia General Assembly should approve a comprehensive smokefree law in Virginia. The Virginia Senate passed smokefree air legislation in February, but the measure was killed in a subcommittee of the House General Laws Committee. Advocates said that legislators must also hear from those impacted by secondhand smoke.

“If you or someone you know has suffered the consequences of secondhand smoke exposure, Virginians for a Healthy Future wants to hear your story,” said Donna Reynolds, Director of Community Relations for the American Lung Association of Virginia. “We have created a blog at www.smokefreevanow.org for Virginians to tell their story. We plan to use these stories to help convince legislators to make Virginia the 15th state to go smokefree.”

Fourteen states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico have passed statewide smokefree workplace laws that include restaurants and bars.

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