

## Office of the Governor

### NEWS RELEASE

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### **GOVERNOR UNVEILS NEW YOUTH ANTI-SMOKING CAMPAIGN BILLBOARD; RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD FOR HER CAMPAIGN AGAINST SMOKING**

Gov. Christie Whitman visited the North Arlington Middle School today to unveil a new youth anti-smoking campaign billboard that will send the message that smoking is dangerous to a person's health. The Governor also received an award from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids for her leadership in utilizing the 1998 tobacco settlement to establish a comprehensive, statewide tobacco prevention program.

"We are going to spend more than \$18 million this year - money from the settlement of our lawsuit against tobacco companies - for a campaign to prevent tobacco use. I'm very pleased to unveil a new billboard campaign as part of that campaign. In the coming weeks, these billboards will be going up across New Jersey, helping to send the message that smoking is dangerous," the Governor said.

"As Governor, I have always stressed accountability and personal responsibility. I have invited everyone to become part of the solution to the smoking problem. I encourage every young person across New Jersey to accept personal responsibility in the fight against smoking," she said.

"What does that mean? It means saying `no' to cigarettes. It means telling people who already smoke that `smoking stinks.' "It means getting the message out to families, to relatives and to friends that smoking is dangerous and they shouldn't get sucked in."

The state's billboard campaign is being coordinated through the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS). Some of the new billboards will picture the Governor with five young people and carry the message, "It's no secret. Smoking stinks. Smoking. Don't Get Sucked In."

Other billboards will display other illustrations and messages, including one depicting cemetery headstones with the message, "Smoking Section. Smoking. Don't Get Sucked In."

The Governor was nominated for the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids' award by NJ Breathes, a private sector, tobacco control coalition supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Called the Mike Synar Memorial Public Service Award, the award is presented annually to a public official(s) who has demonstrated a special commitment to protecting the public's health from the deadly effects of tobacco.

The award is presented by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, along with a number of co-sponsoring organizations, including the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association. The Washington, D. C. - based Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids is the country's largest non-government initiative to protect children from tobacco addiction and exposure to second-hand smoke. The campaign serves as a resource and partner for more than 130 health, civic, corporate, youth and religious groups.

Previous award recipients have included President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, Gov. Lawton Chiles of Florida and Gov. Gary Locke of Washington. The award is named after a former congressman, who represented Oklahoma from 1979 to 1994 and was a leader in the fight against tobacco.

In announcing the award, William D. Novelli, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, and Matthew L. Myers, the campaign's general counsel, cited the budget bill that Gov. Whitman signed in July, which set aside \$18.6 million for tobacco prevention. The officials said this program will save lives and money and Gov. Whitman's leadership is nationally recognized.

"You have set an example and a standard for the country," the officials said in a letter to the Governor.

The Governor's anti-smoking initiatives include:

- "Smoking: Don't Get Sucked In" Campaign. This two-year, \$2 million anti-tobacco media campaign was launched in 1997 and reaches children through TV, print, radio and in-theater advertisements and a web site. It also includes billboard and other advertising to counter the efforts of the tobacco industry, prevent children from starting to smoke and promote quitting.
- Smoking Cessation Programs for Addicted Adults and Youth. These programs will include the promotion of information and referral services, support groups, counseling, and health care programs that provide treatment services.
- School-Based Programs for the Prevention of Tobacco Use. These programs will include peer leadership programs, age-appropriate curriculum, teacher training, school-based cessation programs and activities.
- Community-Based Tobacco Control Programs. These programs will mobilize culturally and professionally diverse groups to reduce the use of tobacco in their communities.
- New Jersey Peer to Peer Program. This program is a comprehensive, school-based program designed to reduce the incidence of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use among middle school students. The program trains leaders in tobacco addiction (as well as other addictions) and gives them specific tasks to establish smoking as non-desirable behavior among their peers. It was developed by the DHSS, the Department of Education and the Department of Law and Public Safety in collaboration with the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and the Princeton Center for Leadership Training.

The Peer to Peer Program was implemented in the North Arlington Middle School in 1997.

The Governor also signed legislation restricting access to tobacco products by New Jersey youth in 1996. This legislation authorized the commissioner of DHSS to enforce the law and delegate his authority to local health departments. Compliance checks are conducted by local health officers. Since enactment of the law, the rate of illegal tobacco sales to minors has decreased from 75% in 1995 to 27% in 1999.

Also, as part of her anti-smoking efforts, the Governor signed legislation raising the tax on cigarettes from 40 cents-per-pack to 80 cents-per-pack, effective January 1, 1998. One year after the tax was enacted, there was a 12% decrease in the number of tax stamps sold for cigarettes in New Jersey.

