

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VDH COMMISSIONER ASKS VIRGINIANS TO SUPPORT THE COMMONWEALTH BREATHE EASY CHALLENGE

(RICHMOND, Va.)—To celebrate the upcoming ban on smoking in restaurants, Virginia's Health Commissioner today called on Virginians to show their support for the new law and local businesses by dining at their favorite smoke-free restaurants.

The Commonwealth's new law to eliminate smoking in Virginia restaurants and protect restaurant workers and patrons from secondhand smoke takes effect Dec. 1. Secondhand smoke is responsible for as many as 1,040 adult deaths per year in Virginia. During restaurant inspections, the Virginia Department of Health will check to ensure that smoking paraphernalia such as ashtrays are removed and that required "no smoking" signs are displayed. The health department will also observe whether anyone in a smoke-free area is smoking and whether any designated smoking areas are in fact structurally separate from non-smoking dining rooms.

At a news conference today, Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA, recognized the 34th annual Great American Smokeout and encouraged Virginians to join her in expressing gratitude to Virginia's restaurant and hospitality industry for supporting efforts to protect public health.

"I am encouraging you to join me in the 'Commonwealth Breathe Easy Challenge' by going to your favorite restaurant on Dec. 1 to thank them for creating a smoke-free environment and congratulating them for their business success," Commissioner Remley said. "Smoke-free dining protects public health, makes good business sense, improves our quality of life and will help all Virginians to breathe easy."

Virginians can learn more about the new law and download appreciation cards from the VDH Web site (www.vdh.virginia.gov/breatheeasy) to thank restaurants that are smoke-free and encourage others to make the move. The Web site answers frequently asked questions and offers "no smoking" signs and materials for restaurant owners to share with customers and staff.

Dr. Remley was joined at the news conference by Marty H. Kilgore, executive director of Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, who discussed a recent survey by the foundation's teen volunteer group, Y Street. The survey, at www.86thesmoke.com, found that a ban on smoking in restaurants would add more customers than it discouraged. For every survey respondent who would dine out less often because of a smoking ban, five said they would dine out more frequently. This supports the conclusion of numerous published studies from around the country that smoke-free measures do not harm restaurant sales.

“We are extremely proud of all the time and energy that our Y Street volunteers put into their project,” said Kilgore. “This group of more than 160 young people conducted a remarkably professional survey.”

Research shows that smoking bans encourage smokers to quit. With the approach of Dec. 1, VDH is bolstering its Quit Now Virginia hotline to serve more than 3,500 smokers a year. Those who want help quitting can call toll-free (800) QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669) to be connected to information and assistance in English and in Spanish. The cessation hotline provides counseling and quit kits to those ready to take the step to a healthier lifestyle.

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