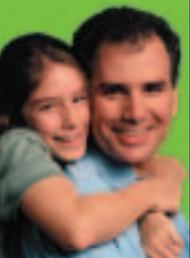


Provide protection against second-hand smoke



Taking the initiative

In March 2000, the Minister for Health and Children published the Government's new tobacco control policy in a report entitled 'Towards a Tobacco Free Society'. The Government directed that the necessary legislation be prepared to give effect to the report and this resulted in the Public Health (Tobacco) Acts, 2002 and 2004.

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children continues to examine the issue of smoking and health. Their report, "A National Anti-Smoking Strategy - A Report on Health and Smoking" published in November 1999 recommended that a national anti-tobacco strategy be adopted, and that the State initiate legal action against the industry for the harm caused by tobacco products.

In January 2001, the Joint Committee established a Sub-Committee on Health and Smoking, to give further consideration to matters arising from their 1999 report. The Sub-Committee has issued a first interim report and the tobacco industry has declined to appear voluntarily before it.



Ensure better compliance with existing anti-smoking laws



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promoting a tobacco free society



Moving towards a Tobacco Free Society will reduce the number of premature deaths from tobacco and result in healthier, longer and better quality lives for many Irish people.



The Problem

Tobacco continues to be the biggest single cause of preventable premature death in Ireland, claiming more than 6,000 lives each year. The stark facts are:

- One in every two smokers who smoke regularly will die from cigarettes
- Nicotine is one of the most addictive drugs known to man
- About two thirds of all children experiment with tobacco and over a quarter are habitual smokers

What needs to be done?

The tobacco epidemic can only be beaten with the commitment of society as a whole. Concerted and sustained effort on a number of fronts is necessary to make progress. Specifically we need to:

- raise awareness of the dangers of smoking
- help smokers to quit
- provide additional protection against second-hand smoke
- focus on protecting children, and
- ensure compliance with existing and new tobacco control laws



When will this happen?

Progress is already being made. A number of the recommendations of the Tobacco Free Society Report have been put into effect, including:

Establishment of an Office of Tobacco Control

The Office of Tobacco Control was set up on an interim basis in 2000 and established on a statutory basis in May 2002. The role of the Office is to support the Government's commitment to taking effective action aimed at reducing the burden of disease and death caused by tobacco. The Office's functions include advising the Minister, conducting and publishing research, co-ordinating a national inspection programme, enforcing and building compliance with the tobacco control laws generally.

Legislation

The Oireachtas has passed comprehensive tobacco control laws known as the Public Health (Tobacco) Act, 2002 and the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) Act 2004. These Acts include provisions to: increase prohibitions on tobacco advertising and sponsorship; restrict the marketing and sale of tobacco; provide for product specification and testing; provide for mandatory health warnings and restrict labelling; and provide for prohibitions on smoking tobacco products.

Smoke-Free Workplaces

Since 29 March 2004 enclosed workplaces are smoke-free by law. This includes licensed premises, restaurants, public transport and registered clubs. The key aim of the "Smoke-Free Workplace Law" is to protect third parties, particularly workers, from the harmful effects of exposure to second-hand smoke. There are certain exemptions to the public health law but even in these workplaces employers are obliged to provide a safe and healthy working environment.



No tobacco sales to people under 18 years

In August 2001, selling tobacco products to people under 18 years became illegal. The maximum fine for such an offence was increased to €2,540; this fine also applies if people under 18 years are allowed use of vending machines selling tobacco products.

Ban on advertising and sponsorship

Tobacco advertising, other than limited retail and trade advertising, was ended in July 2000. Sponsorship by tobacco companies was also banned.

Research Institute for a Tobacco Free Society

On 31 May 2001 - World No Tobacco Day, the Minister for Health and Children launched a research institute to support the development of a tobacco free society. The main aim of the Institute is to form a multi-disciplinary academic community around the issue of tobacco control by engaging in research in all aspects of tobacco from a public health perspective.

NRT is available free to medical card holders

With effect from 1 April 2001, the full range of Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRT) including patches, gum, sprays and tablets became available free of charge to medical card holders on prescription by their GP.

Extra resources have been made available to health boards

The Minister for Health and Children allocated additional funding to allow health boards to recruit more enforcement staff to help build compliance with new and existing tobacco control legislation.