

Great American Smokeout

Reno Gazette-Journal / RGJ.COM

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

The Great American Smokeout is an annual event sponsored by the American Cancer Society and tobacco cessation advocates that encourages smokers to quit for at least one day in the hope that this might challenge them to stop permanently.

For 35 years, this event has been used to educate smokers that quitting is not easy, but can be done. This year's installment of the Great American Smokeout will be held on November 18.

In Nevada, major changes have occurred since the first Smokeout. At that time, over one third of adults in our state smoked and few if any public or private workplaces in Nevada were smoke free.

Since then, much progress has been made in preventing adult tobacco use and, as a result of the passage of the Nevada Clean Indoor Air Act in 2006, reducing exposure to second-hand smoke.

The burden of tobacco on the public's health in Nevada unfortunately remains heavy.

Currently, an estimated 22% of adult Nevadans smoke and over 3,000 adults will die this year as a result of their own smoking. The state's health care system will also incur \$565 million in additional costs directly caused by smoking this year.

Most smokers are well aware of the health consequences and costs of their addiction. These include increased risk for lung, throat, oral, and other types of cancer. While most of these smokers have tried at some point to quit, the good news is that a majority of current smokers want to give up tobacco.

In the past year alone, I lost my father to emphysema and have a sibling currently struggling with lung cancer – tragedies fueled by lifetime addictions to tobacco and undercut by unsuccessful attempts to quit smoking. While I have been spared the health damaging consequences of cigarette smoking, I like most people I know have not been spared the personal anguish of our nation's number one killer.

As such, I challenge every non-smoker to take a moment this Thursday and encourage one smoker in their life to quit smoking for a day or, at a minimum, encourage them to take a moment to make a plan to quit.

For those smokers up to this week's challenge, be assured that options and tools to deal with the demon that is nicotine addiction exist, including the Nevada Tobacco Users Helpline which is only a phone call (1-800-784-8669) or click of the mouse away www.livingtobaccofree.com.

Additional information on the Great American Smokeout can be found at www.cancer.org and resources from the American Lung Association on getting help to quit smoking can be downloaded at www.lungusa.org/stop-smoking/how-to-quit/getting-help/.

John Packham, PhD is Director of Health Policy Research at the University of Nevada School of Medicine and Past President of the Nevada Public Health Association.