



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -
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**PHYSICIANS, ELECTED LEADERS, AND HEALTH ADVOCATES MARK HOUSTON'S THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF SMOKING BAN
BY RALLYING HOUSTONIANS "TO PUT DOWN CIGARETTES FOR GOOD"**

While progress has been made, Houston leaders are urging remaining smokers to improve their health and Houston's environment by asking their doctors for help to quit smoking

HOUSTON (Sept. 1, 2010) – A large group of minority health coalitions, including doctors and elected officials, today celebrated the third anniversary of Houston's successful smoking ban urging Houstonians "to see their doctors and put down their cigarettes for good." The Houston City Council approved the citywide smoking ban on October 18, 2006, and it went into effect on September 1, 2007.

"Smoke Free for 3," a campaign lead by the Hispanic Health Coalition, Asian American Health Coalition, African American Health Coalition, Native American Health Coalition, and Houston Communities for Safe Indoor Air (HCSIA), recognized the City of Houston's leadership and success in creating more smoke free workplaces and public spaces. However, despite the success in public policies, smoking continues to be a significant personal health issue for many Houstonians, particularly for minority communities. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 3,257,000 Texans ages 18+ smoke.

According to the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) of adults ages 18 and older 32.4% of American Indians currently smoke, compared to 22.0% of Whites, 21.3% of African-Americans, 15.8% of Hispanics, and 9.9% of Asian-Americans.

"We are very excited to commemorate the "Smoke Free for 3" anniversary. Passing the smoking ordinance three years ago was a major step in the right direction for the health of our city and the health of our workforce. We are proud that we had a voice in making that happen and continue to support efforts that will impact the health of our Hispanic and minority communities," said Desiree Gonzales Phillips, Hispanic Health Coalition Board Member. "As part of this month-long effort, we are urging smokers to talk to their doctor about quitting and promoting Smoking Cessation resources available throughout the City."

"Cigarettes are the most dangerous consumer product in the world, killing an estimated 25,000 Texans every year. How big is the problem? We estimate that a third of the patients who die at MD Anderson Cancer Center die simply because they smoked cigarettes," said Dr. Joel Dunnington, Director of GI Radiology, UT MD Anderson Cancer Center. "The most effective, and cheapest, public health intervention Texas can implement is to make indoor air smoke free. You not only remove the toxic effects on non-smokers and increase the likelihood that smokers will quit smoking, but it also sends a strong message to children that smoking is not glamorous and is not a socially acceptable activity. "

Texas State Representative Carol Alvarado praised Houston's efforts to reduce the number of smokers, "Houston's smoking ordinance was a result of people from all backgrounds coming together and putting away their ideological differences to make our city a healthier place to live, work and play. Only three years later we can see the pay-off of all of our hard work - cleaner indoor air and a healthier Houston. I am proud to have helped lead this effort."

The 4th largest city in America, Houston is among several cities in Texas with smoke free ordinances including Austin, Dallas, San Antonio, Baytown, Galveston, Pearland, and Pasadena.

Texas State Senator Rodney Ellis encouraged action in his video taped remarks at Wednesday's event. "This is a press conference to kick-off a month of activities to encourage people in our minority communities to empower themselves and to take an interest in reducing smoking in our communities."

Minority health coalitions advocated in support of the City of Houston's Smoking Ordinance and have continued to work over these last three years to help thousands of residents and workers stay healthy. Smoke-free workplaces and public spaces are essential to ensuring the public health and wellbeing of our residents. "Smoke-Free for 3" is a coordinated effort lead by Houston's minority health coalitions and physicians to celebrate the city's commitment and encourage Houstonians to seek their doctor's advice on how to quit smoking.

For more information and tips for quitting smoking, call **1-877-YES-QUIT** or go to www.yesquit.com