

## Smoke-free workplace campaign stalls in Alberta

### Ban not high on government's priority list

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EDMONTON - Heather Crowe's cross-Canada crusade for smoke-free workplaces has hit a wall in Alberta.

The former Ottawa waitress, who got lung cancer from second-hand smoke, has the support of Alberta Health Minister Gary Mar for a ban on workplace smoking, but the government as a whole is still unmoved.

"I have made the effort to take it forward," Mar told reporters Monday. "However, our caucus has not seen fit to pass that."

Human Resources Minister Clint Dunford said in an interview that banning workplace smoking isn't high on his priority list.

"We're not ready yet to move forward in that particular area," he said.

At the moment, it's up to municipalities to ban smoking in workplaces, resulting in a patchwork of legislation across the province. In Edmonton, for example, smoking is banned in most indoor workplaces, including restaurants. (The law doesn't apply to the Legislature and Legislature Annex, where ministers and other MLAs are allowed to smoke in their own offices.)

By July 1, 2005, Edmonton's ban will extend to bars, bingos and casinos. But surrounding communities have different bylaws, resulting in calls for provincial legislation so every business has to play by the same rules.

Dunford said his department is focused on reducing worksite accidents and reducing drug and alcohol impairment on the job.

Crowe was in town Monday to help launch a new Health Canada anti-smoking ad, featuring her and Barb Tarbox, that will run in theatres across the country in December.

"I met Barb on what I consider the road to death," she told a packed auditorium at Louis St. Laurent high school, the school where Tarbox made her final public appearance in May. Tarbox died from smoking cigarettes, Crowe said, while she's dying from exposure to cigarette smoke.

Crowe saw Tarbox in Edmonton last March, when the 41-year-old Edmonton anti-smoking crusader was very sick. Her own cancer is currently in remission, but she says her hope of recovery is only about five per cent.

"I want to be the last person to die of second-hand smoke at work," Crowe told the students.

Les Hagen of Action on Smoking and Health said the governments of Ontario, Manitoba and Nunavut have



**Ed Kaiser, The Journal / Non-smoking activist Heather Crowe, right, here to help launch a new anti-smoking campaign, says goodbye to Tracy Mueller following a presentation at Louis St. Laurent high school on Monday.**

all pledged to ban smoking in workplaces within the next two to three years.

"Alberta is running out of excuses," Hagen said.

He said one frequent argument -- that it's unfair to expect smokers to stand outside in Alberta winters to smoke -- was disproved by the Heritage Classic hockey game on Saturday, where fans sat outside for hours.

At the high school assembly, a student asked Mar and federal Health Minister Anne McLellan why smoking isn't banned totally, if it's so harmful.

"I think it's not banned because of a lack of political will," McLellan said.

Mar disagreed. He pointed to the bad effects of prohibition of alcohol -- illegal sales, violent clashes between illegal sellers -- as a reason not to push tobacco sales underground.

Mar asked students at the assembly how many had quit smoking as a result of Barb Tarbox's emotional presentation last April. By school principal Brent Patterson's count, 22 students raised their hands.

It's hard to measure how many students are smoking now, because smoking on school grounds was banned recently, Patterson said.

Crowe said she hopes Dunford can arrange for her to present her case for a ban on workplace smoking to all of Canada's labour ministers when they meet in Banff in January.

Dunford said he'll contact his counterparts to see if Crowe can be included on the agenda.

Among those at the launch of the new federal ad was Barb Tarbox's husband, Pat.

"I'm happy to do my part to lend a hand and keep the message alive," he said.

He and daughter Mackenzie will be in Ottawa next Friday to receive a Governor General's medal for meritorious service on behalf of Barb.

A 16-minute video on Tarbox, currently being distributed to Alberta schools by the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, is being made available to any school across Canada for grades 6 to 12. The distribution will be funded by Health Canada.

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