

# Highlights in Tobacco Control

A Newsletter for Texas Communities

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## Worth a Look

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Creating awareness about the Texas Tobacco Law and its enforcement are the goals of the Texas Department of Health's public service campaign, Worth It?. The statewide campaign is comprised of several components: community events, promotional items, paid advertising and a web site, [www.worthit.org](http://www.worthit.org)

While the theme of the web site is clearly geared for teens, the information on the web site can be useful for adults. Worthit.org is a valuable tool communities may not be utilizing to its fullest extent to assist with their tobacco prevention efforts. For example, from the home page, users may click on the Events tab. On the Events page, we are able to list community tobacco prevention events that include or target high school teens. Community representatives may send information about their event for inclusion on the web site and then refer people to the [worthit.org](http://www.worthit.org) site for details or additional information regarding their event. Event information may be sent in advance to: [worth.it@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:worth.it@tdh.state.tx.us).

Worthit.org also serves as a convenient tool for parents and teens to find a tobacco awareness class in their county. All instructors certified to teach a tobacco awareness class are listed in a database on the web site. Educators can use the site as a resource to find tobacco use facts, links to other web sites, information about the Texas Tobacco Law and the economic costs of smoking with the Up N Smoke Calculator.

The Worth It? web site is an important asset that can be utilized as a resource by communities, adults and teens. Encouraging others to explore [worthit.org](http://www.worthit.org) can help to increase awareness of the Texas Tobacco Law and local tobacco prevention efforts. 

## Youth Tobacco Awareness Classes: Powerful Not Punitive

By Barry Sharp, MSHP, CHES  
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Just mentioning the tobacco awareness classes can cause adults to shiver and youth to break out in a cold sweat. Flashbacks of pot-bellied coaches teaching driver's ed or being forced to sit in a



defensive driving course being told how you are threat to society come to mind.

While youth aren't flocking to voluntarily take the class (just like adult smokers aren't jamming the cessation programs), nearly 8 of 10 kids taking the class would recommend it to their friends. In addition, a large percentage of the youth taking the class report being tobacco free at three and six month intervals following the class and more than half report trying to quit during that time.<sup>1</sup>

The curriculum for the 8-hour class was originally developed by Dennis Smith, PhD, at the University of Houston, and Brian Colwell, PhD, CHES, at the Texas A&M School of Rural Public Health under a grant from the Texas Cancer Council<sup>2</sup>. The first instructors were trained on a pilot version of the curriculum in December 1997, less than a month before the youth possession law went into effect. The second draft was released in the spring of 1998 with the completed first edition coming out in 1999.

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The second edition, released in 2002, featured a revamped curriculum and student workbooks, new videos and a new pre-adolescent module. With each new edition, all instructors previously trained must be re-trained on the newer curriculum.

Like the original *Adolescent Tobacco Use Awareness and Cessation Program* curriculum, the new curriculum uses a facilitated learning style that is activity driven, which encourages the youth to learn, share and be active participants in the class. The curriculum focuses on the social and cultural



influences for youth initiation and continuation of tobacco use, developing coping skills to deal with the everyday life stressors that influence and enable tobacco use, and cessation skills. Youth are also challenged to make a change in their tobacco behaviors between each session.

The hallmark of the class is that it is not preachy (the instructor signs a contract with the class not to preach and allows the youth to call them down if they do), focuses on the youth's needs and doesn't try to ram the cessation message down their collective throats. The curriculum is aimed at those youth who are in pre-contemplation and contemplation stages towards their tobacco use. One of the early evaluations by Dr. Stacey Stevens (formerly of Texas A&M School of Rural Public Health, now at the Texas Commission for Alcohol and Drug Abuse) showed a significant shift just during the class of youth moving from pre-contemplation and contemplation into the preparation and action stages.<sup>3</sup>

What makes the class work? The facilitators, who may have varied educational and work backgrounds from addiction counseling to law enforcement, are the key to the success of the Texas Youth Tobacco Awareness Program (the official TDH/OTPC name for the program). These individuals step into a room of 10 to 20 hostile teenagers and prove time and time



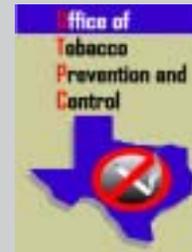
again that not only do they care about following the curriculum they also care for the kids.<sup>2</sup>

The second major link is community involvement in enforcement of the state's youth tobacco possession laws. Local law enforcement officials taking the law seriously and making enforcement a priority in their agencies, according to research by Clete Snell, PhD, Prairie View A&M University, can influence the actions of officers on the street.<sup>3</sup> Local municipal judges and justices of the peace provide the bridge between the ticket and the instructors by mandating the youth to the court as required by law.

By active participation from enforcement and judicial agencies, Texas youth are given a chance to make a change in their tobacco habits. By creating informed tobacco consumers, youth taking the awareness class are empowered to take control of their tobacco addiction and become a change agent for their future. 

### Alliance for a Tobacco-free Texas

*Live it. Breathe it.*



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<sup>1</sup> Texas Department of Health, (1999) Tobacco in Texas, 1998, A Report to the 76th Texas Legislature, Austin, Texas

<sup>2</sup> Smith, D.W., (1996) School/Community-based Adolescent Tobacco Use Cessation Program, (<http://www.texasoncology.org>)

<sup>3</sup> Smith, D.W., Colwell, B., Zhang, J.J., Brimer, J., McMillan, C., and Stevens, S., *Theory-based Development and Testing of an Adolescent Tobacco-Use Awareness Program*, AmJ Health Behavior 2002;26(2):137-144.

<sup>4</sup> Texas Department of Health, (2001) Texas Tobacco Prevention Initiative: Infrastructure Baseline Data, Austin, Tx. (15-17)