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**Non-Smokers' Rights Association  
Association of Local Public Health Agencies**

**NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR RELEASE - WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2005, 10:00 A.M.**

Health agencies sound alarm about threat to tobacco "Power Wall" advertising ban

TORONTO - Health agencies joined with medical officers of health at Queen's Park today to warn Ontarians that unless Bill 164, the Smoke-free Ontario Act, is amended, one of the McGuinty government's key tobacco control campaign promises may be lost.

The Non-Smokers' Rights Association and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) which represents medical officers of health and boards of health across Ontario, urged the Liberal government to keep its election campaign promise to ban the "power walls" of tobacco that advertise cigarettes to kids in more than 8,000 Ontario convenience stores.

"Cigarette power walls are tobacco advertising, pure and simple," said Linda Stewart, executive director of alPHA. "And governments across Canada have promised to stop tobacco advertising that impacts on kids. Tobacco companies know how power wall tobacco displays sell cigarettes, especially to kids, and so does the Ontario government. The government's decision to back away from a full ban on tobacco advertising in stores is a political decision based on tobacco industry pressure. It has nothing to do with public health or the protection of Ontario kids. We have to persuade the Premier to change course."

"My sense of the issue is that the Premier and the Health Minister may not understand how powerful tobacco power walls are or how they influence our kids," said Jeffrey Gottheil, president of J. Gottheil Marketing Communications and an expert in point-of-purchase advertising. "The report we are releasing here is clear. Tobacco power walls are the most important advertising medium available to the tobacco industry today. If you don't ban cigarette power walls as they have in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, your kids, your neighbour's kids, your grandchildren are exposed to what is arguably the most aggressive marketing tool that the tobacco industry has used in the last decade."

"Cigarettes kill nearly one out of two of their long term customers," said Dr. David McKeown, medical officer of health for the City of Toronto and a member of alPHA. "Why would we expect kids to take the risks of tobacco products seriously when cigarettes are sold prominently next to candy, gum and hockey cards in corner stores? Tobacco power walls undermine the work that parents and health professionals are doing to warn kids about the health risks of smoking."

"One of the purposes of power walls is to normalize cigarettes," said Ms. Stewart, "and the industry is prepared to spend a king's ransom in order to maintain this legitimacy. Unfortunately, it is a completely unwarranted legitimacy. And it is contributing to the difficulty we are having in reducing youth smoking rates."

"When a government backs away from an election promise, someone usually loses out," said Garfield Mahood, NSRA executive director. "But when a broken promise involves steps to stop an epidemic, when it involves measures to keep a drug addiction away from kids, failure to honour that commitment literally will cause deaths down the road. We are hoping to persuade the Premier and the Health Minister that the future health of our kids is important enough to justify standing up to the tobacco lobby."

"With a straight face, the tobacco industry tells legislators that the purpose of power wall tobacco advertising is to persuade smokers to switch brands," said Francis Thompson, policy analyst for the NSRA. "This is pure economic nonsense and the industry knows this. The extraordinary amount of money spent on tobacco power walls is to create a climate conducive to bringing kids into the market. Power walls also encourage former smokers to relapse and start smoking again and create an army of dependent retailers who will ally themselves with the manufacturers."

"This problem will not be resolved by anything short of a complete point-of-purchase tobacco advertising ban," said Mr. Mahood. "We want these products out of sight and out of mind. They cannot be visible to children. Anything less will create a loophole that the industry will drive a truck through."

"We plan to make this an issue," said Ms. Stewart. "I think when health units and health agencies see that Bill 164 will allow power wall promotion to continue, they will be truly unhappy."

The NSRA is a national non-profit tobacco control organization with offices in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. alPHa is a provincial association that represents medical officers of health and boards of health across Ontario.

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