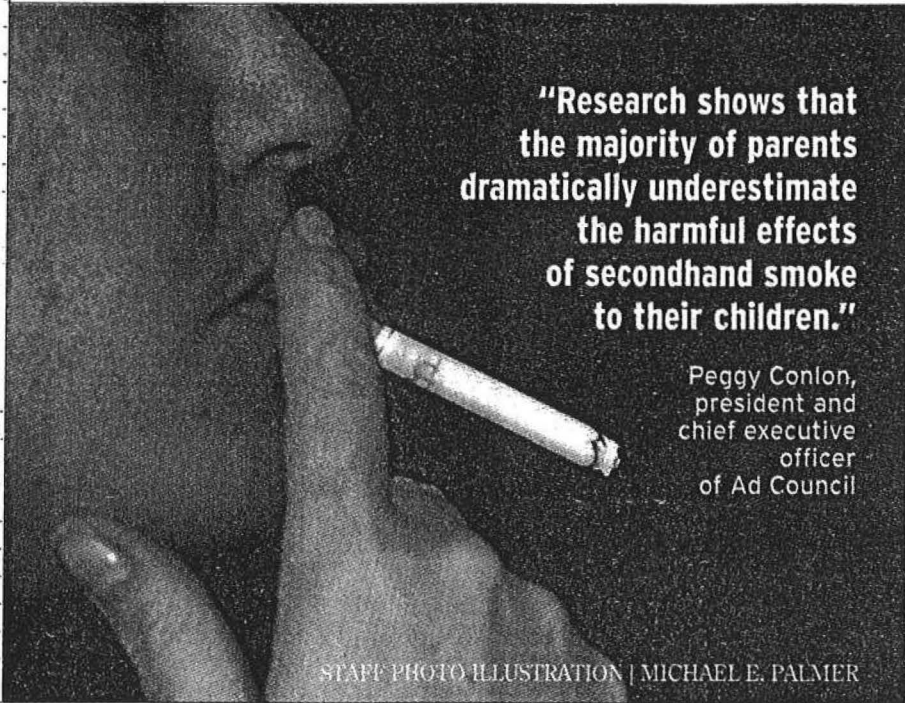


The Tuscaloosa News

TUSCALOOSA, NORTHPORT, WEST ALABAMA

MONDAY, JANUARY 17, 2005 50¢

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"Research shows that the majority of parents dramatically underestimate the harmful effects of secondhand smoke to their children."

Peggy Conlon,
president and
chief executive
officer
of Ad Council

STAFF PHOTO ILLUSTRATION | MICHAEL E. PALMER

Health group launches anti-smoking campaign

By Suzelle Temporo
Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON | Whoopee cushions and warnings about the negative effects of "passing gas" accompanied the launch of a new ad campaign against secondhand smoke last week.

The American Legacy Foundation, a public health foundation created by the \$206 billion tobacco settlement in 1998, and the Advertising Council, a nonprofit organization that creates public service campaigns, announced a new national

public health campaign using humor to educate adults about the effects of secondhand smoke on children.

"Don't pass gas" public service announcements will begin to appear on radio and television as well as in print next week, creating the first national, multimedia campaign to address the issues of secondhand smoke, according to the Ad Council.

"Research shows that the majority of parents dramatically underestimate the harmful effects of secondhand smoke

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SMOKING

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to their children," said Peggy Conlon, president and chief executive officer of the Ad Council. The campaign has the potential to "play a major role in reducing secondhand smoke exposure."

But not everyone is convinced that the newest PSA campaign will do much to impact American's smoking habits.

"My main question is what took the Ad Council so long; where have they been?" said Alan Blum, director of the University of Alabama's Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. "This subject probably affects more lives than everything else that they've been doing."

Blum noted that the U.S. surgeon general raised suspicions about the dangers of smoking more than 40 years ago.

"It's a glaring omission; they used to deal with litter, seat belts, forest fires, and you name it," Blum added. "And in general, it's a much needed topic that ear infections, colds and even school

delay can be the results of the exposure of smoke."

The Foundation noted that a 2003 Legacy Media Tracking Survey found 13 percent of youth aged 12 to 17, or about 4 million youth, were exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes.

A 2003 survey by the Alabama Department of Public Health about attitudes toward smoking restrictions showed that 59.5 percent of respondents thought that breathing smoke from other people's cigarettes was "very harmful" to one's health. An additional 31.1 percent thought it was "somewhat harmful." That study included 423 respondents in Tuscaloosa among the 4,111 completed interviews.

In the same survey, non-smokers (70.8 percent) were more likely than smokers (27.5 percent) to say it was very harmful.

Most adults agree that secondhand smoke can be harmful, but many adults are unclear about the harmful effects that secondhand smoke has on children, according to the foundation,

In Tuscaloosa, however, when respondents to the ADPH survey

were asked whether they thought breathing smoke from someone else's cigarette caused specific health problems, 82.1 percent answered "yes" to lung cancer, 89.7 percent to respiratory problems in children and 37.1 percent to SIDS.

Yet, not everyone believes the potential harm caused by secondhand smoke warrants legislative smoking bans in restaurants, bars and public places.

Terry Gray of the Kentucky chapter of Fight Ordinances and Restrictions to Control and Eliminate Smoking believes there shouldn't be legislative bans anywhere because people are capable of showing their preferences by where they spend their money.

And day-care centers, schools and other public places where children may be present shouldn't be any different, Gray said.

"We as a society have gotten away from parents raising their kids," Gray said. "Parents should make the decision if they want their children around smoke or not."

Gray is not alone in believing that legislating bans on smoking

is not the answer to the current debate. In the ADPH survey, 42.9 percent of the Florence respondents would support a local law making bars and cocktail lounges smoke free, while 72.5 percent would support a ban in restaurants. A large majority supported smoke-free government buildings (88.5 percent), indoor work places (83.9 percent) and indoor retail areas (89.6 percent).

Blum said that while the new ad campaign could increase awareness of the dangers of secondhand smoke, he doesn't believe it will have a significant impact due to the nature of public service announcements. Stations air PSAs as a community service and receive no money for them. As a result, the ads are rarely shown during peak hours.

"The Ad Council can point to all the hundreds of campaigns they have done. But I don't think they can point to any successes that they have had separate from any others," Blum said.

"They are good symbolic efforts, but the most that you'll hear about them is the day they show the ads at the press conference."