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Oregon Death Certificates to List Smoking

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According to Joyce Grant-Worley, the State Health Division's chief research analyst, the 1989 death certificates will ask, "Did tobacco use contribute to the death?"

Doctors will be able to check boxes marked "yes," "no," "probably" or "unknown."

Oregon is the first state in the nation to add such a section to its death certificates, Ms. Grant-Worley said. The information will be used in studies of the link between smoking and death rates, she said. Research Began in 1987

Oregon's research into the issue began in 1987, and while doctors were encouraged to report smoking-related deaths, the state provided no reminder on its death certificates.

In the past, the state sent letters to doctors asking about tobacco use if lung cancer, emphysema, bronchitis or heart disease were reported on a death certificate without mention of smoking.

Health Division statistics gathered since 1987 indicate that tobacco use contributed to 70 percent to 82 percent of respiratory disease deaths in Oregon.

Before 1987, smoking was listed on below 5 percent of the death certificates that listed respiratory diseases as the cause of death.

Researchers say the deaths of about one in seven men and one in 10 women in Oregon were caused by lung cancer or other respiratory diseases in 1987.

State health officials hope the statistics will eventually help lawmakers and health groups to plan programs to cut the smoking rate and identify those at risk for respiratory diseases.