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Tobacco Town Hall Meeting Wednesday

By **STEPHANIE TAYLOR FERRIELL**
Leader-Democrat Editor

A Smoke Free Air Town Hall Meeting will discuss the health consequences of secondhand smoke, the economic impact to businesses and how a comprehensive smoke-free air law would address both. The meeting will be held next Wednesday, March 16, at 7 p.m. at the Salem High School presentation room.

The meetings are being held all across the state to educate the community on secondhand smoke and why "we need a state law to protect all workers in all workplaces from the harmful effects," said Rhonda Mills, Washington County Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Coalition chairwoman. "It's long overdue for our state to implement a smoke-free policy."

An Indiana House bill making the state smoke-free contained exemptions for casinos, fraternal organizations and nursing homes. It's now in the Senate where proponents hope it will be tightened. "It's still in the legislative process," said Mills. "What we want to happen and what would be the best thing for Indiana is for all legislators to support the bill, remove the exemptions and pass it."

Among the panelists at next Wednesday's meeting is Judge Frank Newkirk, a former state legislator, who will explain how a bill becomes a law.

Pamela Hudson-Blevins of Blue River Wood Products will address "Taking your business smoke-free." Research shows that "business improves and increases when places adopt smoke-free workplace policies," said Mills. She said she's talked to numerous restaurant owners in two counties that are smoke-free and has found business has increased for them. When New York City went smoke-free, restaurants saw an increase in business. "You can't compare Washington County and Salem to New York City, but you can compare one successful business to another," she said.

Mills said restaurants and other businesses that allow smoking bear increased costs for maintaining ventilation systems, replacing carpeting and other items damaged by smoke and staff time keeping areas clean.

Three panelists will touch of the health-related aspects of secondhand smoke; Dr. Kalen Carty, Buffy McKinney of the Midwest American Heart Association and Mary Armstrong Swift. Mills said there are more than 7,000 chemicals in secondhand smoke and 70 are known carcinogen. "Secondhand smoke was classified as a group A carcinogen in 1993 by the EPA, along with things like asbestos and benzene." Mills said there are three sources of secondhand smoke exposure: smoke which the smoker exhales, smoke from the burning end of the cigarette and residual smoke such as that found in carpeting, furniture, upholstery and clothing. "As long as you can breathe it and smell it, harmful chemicals are present," she said.

Carla Snegas, executive director of Indiana Tobacco Prevention and Cessation, is a widely recognized authority on smoking issues who will share her insight at the town hall. She has spoken both nationally and internationally and has appeared on the Today Show. She will address "Indiana and secondhand smoke." Mills said, "It's a great lineup of speakers. K Yff Y df J] JY[YX UbX \cbcfYX hc \Uj Y hYa hU_Y h_Y]f hja Y hc V6a Y UbX \Y d YXI WUW h_Y di V]W"

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Some think state should just butt-out...

Tasty House, one of the few restaurants in Salem that still offers a smoking section, has gone smoke-free on Sundays. Owner Holly Tye said they've heard complaints from both smoking and non-smoking customers since the policy went into place. However, some of her regular customers have strong feelings about having the state decide whether or not they should be allowed to smoke in public.

Sharon Cole said she has already stopped patronizing restaurants that no longer offer a smoking section.

"If they put a ban on this one I'd stop eating here too," she said. "And, if they smoking everywhere I'll probably just stop going out to eat altogether because this is part of our enjoyment when we go out to have a meal and coffee. It all goes together."

Cole feels the issue is not something the state needs to decide.

"I think the state should keep its nose out of it. Period."

Judy Setser was joining Cole for lunch, and said non-smokers already have the upper hand.

"I can't understand why all these people are complaining. There's more restaurants in town that are non-smoking anyway, so they can just go there."

Sonny Tatlock said he smoked for a period of time but quit the habit long ago. However, he was the only non-smoker sitting at a table of four and said he didn't mind sitting in the smoking section with his buddies.

"I smoked for four years while I was in the service, but I haven't for over 40 years now. It's not usually too bad in here, it just depends on the thickness of the smoke, but I don't walk into a building where there's smokers and act like I'm choking," he explained.