

NEWS RELEASE

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Montgomery County Participates in Smoke-Free County Challenge

You are invited to participate in a county-wide effort to protect children from secondhand smoke. The Regional Air Pollution Control Agency (RAPCA) has entered Montgomery County in the National Association of Counties (NACo) 2004 Smoke-Free County Challenge. NACo conducts the challenge in collaboration with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Smoke-Free Home Pledge Initiative, which focuses on children and environmental tobacco smoke (also commonly known as secondhand smoke). The Smoke-Free Home Pledge Initiative is designed to educate parents and caregivers about health risks to children from secondhand smoke exposure and encourage them to commit to providing a smoke-free environment in their homes and cars. Currently, 25 counties nationwide are participating in the challenge. The county recruiting the most pledges by May 31, 2004 will receive a recognition plaque, and all of the participating counties will receive national recognition.

An estimated 20 percent of U.S. children 6 years of age or younger are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke in the home. Protecting children from secondhand smoke is especially important because their bodies are growing and developing. Exposure to secondhand smoke can cause children to experience more respiratory infections, including bronchitis and pneumonia, middle-ear infections, and more frequent and severe asthma attacks. A recent study by the National Academy of Science confirmed that secondhand smoke causes young children's asthma symptoms to worsen and found suggestive evidence of an association between secondhand smoke exposure and new cases of asthma in young children. Secondhand smoke exposure has also been linked to low birth weights and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, also known as SIDS, according to reports by the California Environmental Protection Agency.

"Taking the pledge indicates that you are committed to protecting children from secondhand smoke in your home and vehicle," says RAPCA Director John Paul. "It is up to parents and caregivers to keep kids safe from secondhand smoke, because children do not have a choice." The pledge is open to all parents and caregivers, smokers and nonsmokers. Multiple pledges from each household are encouraged, and everyone who takes the pledge should support family, friends and coworkers in taking the pledge. RAPCA also promotes residents in neighboring counties to take the pledge, as every pledge protects kids from secondhand smoke.

Interested residents can take the pledge by calling 1-866-SMOKE-FREE [1-866-766-5337] or visiting www.epa.gov/smokefree. Locally, residents can call RAPCA at 937-225-4435 or email stewarkj@rapca.org for more information. Residents may also pick up information and take the pledge through May 31, 2004 at the Smoke-Free County Challenge display in the Reibold Building lobby, 117 S. Main Street in Dayton. Pledges collected through May 31, 2004 will count toward the challenge totals, but RAPCA and U.S. EPA will continue to collect pledges after the challenge ends from residents in any county.