



# News Release

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## DEM, HEALTH ANNOUNCE SMOKE-FREE STATE BEACHES CAMPAIGN

### **Program Stems from Legislative Proposal Introduced by Representative Peter Lewiss of Westerly**

PROVIDENCE – The Department of Environmental Management and the Department of Health (HEALTH) today announced the start of a voluntary no smoking initiative at all Rhode Island state beaches. In doing so, Rhode Island joins the growing movement to keep beaches clean and to protect people and wildlife from the risks and ramifications of smoking at the beach, and may be the first state to initiate a statewide smoke-free beach campaign.

The concept for the program grew out of legislative proposals introduced this year by Representative Peter Lewiss of Westerly and Senator Rhoda Perry of Providence. As a result of subsequent collaboration between Rep. Lewiss and DEM, HEALTH, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the RI Chapter of the Sierra Club, and the American Lung Association of Rhode Island, a decision was made to launch a voluntary initiative rather than pursue a statutory ban.

“Although the program is voluntary, we are asking for the participation of all beach-goers to help keep our beaches clean, healthy, and safe,” said DEM Director W. Michael Sullivan, who hosted the 2 p.m. program at Misquamicut State Beach in Westerly introducing the initiative. “We commend Representative Lewiss and Senator Perry for their leadership on this issue, and we welcome the opportunity to help make the beach experience more enjoyable for residents and visitors alike.”

Cigarettes are the number one source of litter on beaches. They can also sicken children and wildlife that may ingest butts left in the sand, thinking they are food. And a still-smoldering butt can cause a burn, if stepped on with bare feet.

Dr. David R. Gifford, MD, MPH, Director of the Department of Health, said, “Congratulations to Representative Lewiss, our community partners, and staff at HEALTH and DEM for this bold step in making Rhode Island’s beaches even more enjoyable. There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke. Rhode Islanders should be commended for voluntarily eliminating dangerous second-hand smoke and cigarette butts from all our state beaches.”

“I find it amazing, and somewhat disappointing, that there might be cleaner air to breathe in bars in Rhode Island than at beaches,” said Representative Lewiss. “Going to the beach is a

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healthy and invigorating thing, a family fun thing. Smoke doesn't belong at a beach, any more than it does inside a restaurant."

"Cigarette filters don't degrade and may last for more than 10 years in the sand, degrading the beauty of the beach," said Eugenia Marks, Senior Director for Policy of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island. For 25 years, Audubon Society has been the state coordinator for the International Coastal Cleanup that tallies each piece of trash collected on the third Saturday of every September since 1985. In the last 10 years, cigarette butts have been the most prevalent item littering the beach, totaling two to three times more than the second highest item, bottle lids.

As part of the smoke-free beaches campaign, public service announcements and bus tailboards produced by HEALTH with tobacco settlement funds will promote the program. Signs, designed by DEM Parks and Recreation staff, are being placed at all state beaches. Periodic announcements will also be made over the public address systems at all state beaches. With the help of volunteers from the annual coastal cleanup program, the Audubon Society will coordinate a survey of beach-goers in August to assess the program. DEM will evaluate the public feedback, and consider any recommended changes as the program moves forward.

With implementation of the state's initiative, Rhode Island state beaches join a growing number of smoke-free beaches. Here in Rhode Island, Barrington does not allow smoking on the town beach proper, and in Warren, since smoking is not allowed on the beach-wide playground, the beach is effectively a smoke-free location.

According to research by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, a number of California counties and several municipalities in other states have instituted smoking bans. The impetus for at least two of the bans — one in Kailua-Kona, HI, and one in Solana Beach, CA — was provided by school students. Solana Beach in 2003 became the nation's first smoke-free ocean beach, followed soon after by all beaches in San Diego and Los Angeles Counties and the City of Pasadena, providing a miles-long smoke-free area along California's scenic Pacific coast. Several freshwater beaches in New England are also smoke-free, including those in Conway and Windham, NH, Winthrop, ME, and Sharon, MA, and, on the Atlantic Coast, beach smoking is banned in the seaside town of Belmar, NJ. Audubon staff interviewed several municipal officials where bans are in place. Most say that smoking and cigarette butt litter has been reduced, and that education, not citation, is emphasized.