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The American Cancer Society and its advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), will celebrate the 35th Great American Smokeout on Nov. 18 by calling on Indiana state lawmakers to protect the health of Hoosier workers and patrons with the passage of a comprehensive smoke-free law. Comprehensive smoke-free policies not only protect workers and patrons from exposure to toxic secondhand smoke, but they also empower smokers to quit.

“With more than 3,000 municipalities, 23 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico now protected by strong comprehensive smoke-free laws, more Americans are now able to dine out or earn a living without sacrificing their health,” said Vicki Rakowski, COO, American Cancer Society Great Lakes Division, Inc. “Still, thousands in Indiana remain exposed to secondhand smoke each day. It’s time for Indiana lawmakers to take a stand for public health and pass a smoke-free law that will protect all workers in from this deadly yet preventable health hazard.”

The Society and ACS CAN are working with the Indiana Campaign for Smokefree Air to urge the Indiana General Assembly to make passing a comprehensive smokefree law a priority in the upcoming session. “We are urging people to contact their legislators to encourage them to get a smokefree bill passed in the upcoming January session. They can do so by going to acscan.org/indiana for information, and additionally, they can join the smokefree air campaign movement by visiting the Indiana Campaign for Smokefree Air on Facebook,” said Rakowski.

A pre-election poll, conducted by Bellwether Research and Consulting in October 2010, showed public support for passage of a comprehensive smokefree law. Fifty-three percent of Hoosiers polled said they were “likely” or “much more likely” to vote for a candidate who supports smokefree air legislation. Ninety-two percent of those polled stated they would be more likely or just as likely to visit establishments that will go smokefree under a statewide law. Sixty-six percent of those polled say their impression of restaurants and other establishments would improve if they convert to smokefree.

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, with 30 percent of all cancer deaths caused by tobacco use. Moreover, secondhand smoke is a major health hazard, proven to cause lung cancer, heart disease and emphysema. With 4,000 chemicals and more than 60 carcinogens, including arsenic and polonium, secondhand smoke is responsible for 3,400 lung cancer deaths annually and another 46,000 deaths from heart disease in otherwise healthy non-smokers.

The Great American Smokeout began more than 30 years ago as a platform to encourage smokers to quit. Since then, the platform has expanded to not only encourage smokers to make a plan to quit, but also to encourage all Americans to advocate.