



No more half measures: European tobacco control experts call on Austria to protect children and non-smokers by adopting comprehensive smokefree legislation

4 October 2007 - European Health Forum Gastein, Austria. Speaking at a session today entitled “Europe Against Tobacco – What Next?” at the European Health Forum in Gastein along with key European Commission officials, European tobacco control experts called upon the Austrian government to strengthen significantly a proposed legislation on smokefree public areas and workplaces.

The draft law currently before Parliament gives hospitality venues under 75 square metres the option of either going completely smokefree, or continuing to allow smoking everywhere. Venues over 75 square metres will be required to offer both smoking and non-smoking areas. Panellists and participants at the meeting described the proposed measures as disappointingly weak and inconsistent with the objectives of protecting customers and employees from the proven harmful effects of passive exposure to tobacco smoke.

“We are in Gastein today to discuss the future of tobacco control in Europe“, said Andrew Hayes, Programme Director, SmokeFree London, “yet this draft legislation looks backwards to the early 1990s and in fact seems to overturn existing measures. Half-measures and smoking areas do not work nor are they supported by experts or the public. Only comprehensive smokefree laws covering all workplaces prevent exposure to second hand smoke and protect the population. The smokefree law in England is extremely successful and is respected in 97% of workplaces.”

“Europeans overwhelmingly support 100% smokefree bars and restaurants and Austrians are no different,” said Fiona Godfrey, EU Policy Advisor of the European Respiratory Society. “Thousands of premature deaths can be prevented if Austrian political leaders recognise this and amend the draft bill“.

She went on to say, “Hosting the successful European Health Forum in Gastein, Austria should also live up to its public health responsibilities. If it does not, we could see the European public health community follow the example of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). At the Second Conference of the Parties (CoP) of the FCTC in July this year, 149 countries refused to return to Geneva for the next CoP because of Switzerland’s poor record on smokefree legislation. It would be a great shame to leave Gastein but health advocates have to think about whether they can continue to support a major event in a country with such a defiantly poor record on tobacco control, while tobacco remains the biggest single cause of premature death of EU citizens.”

Further information:

EHFG Press Office, Mag. Thomas Brey, info@mbdialog.at, Tel.: +43 (0) 64 32/20262, mobile: +43 (0) 676/542 39 09

Additional press information on the EHFG and pictures can be found at www.ehfg.org