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The Georgia Smokefree Air Act of 2005 becomes law

June 30, 2005

ATLANTA (GA) – As of July 1, 2005, the Georgia Smokefree Air Act officially becomes law, and the Department of Human Resources (DHR) wants to help the public become acquainted with its provisions.

The Georgia Smokefree Air Act prohibits smoking in most public places and sets forth guidelines for establishments that still wish to allow smoking. Health officials stress the importance of this new law for health and welcome the opportunity to educate the community on its benefits.

"This new law is important because it reduces the risk of chronic disease and illness associated with exposure to secondhand smoke, and it provides an opportunity for DHR to educate the public about what the law requires and why it is important," said Stuart T. Brown, M.D., director of the Division of Public Health. "We are challenged with a new role in public health and energized by the opportunity to help Georgia become a healthier place to live, work and play."

Brown adds that the new law will be enforceable like any other law and it will be treated like any other law. According to the new law, smoking will be prohibited in most public places, including: State buildings, restaurants/bars serving or employing persons under age 18, places of employment, auditoriums, class rooms, and medical facilities. However, the law does provide for some exemptions, including: private homes, hotel rooms designated as smoking rooms, long-term care facilities, outdoor areas of employment, smoking areas in international airports, and restaurants/bars which do not give access to or employ persons under age 18.

"By prohibiting smoking and preventing secondhand smoke exposure in public places, we can begin to reduce the numbers of tobacco related deaths in Georgia each year, which number more than 11,000," said Brown.

Brown said Public Health will initiate an intensified education effort around the "Be Smokefree" component of our statewide Live Healthy Georgia campaign on July 1. In addition, local and state public health staff will work with communities that already have smoking ordinances and conduct site visits to assist local communities in complying with the new law.

Secondhand smoke is the smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, pipe, or cigar that contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Forty of these substances are known to cause cancer in humans or animals. Exposure to secondhand smoke can cause severe health problems in smokers and non-smokers including cancer,

emphysema and asthma. Children are especially vulnerable, added Brown.

For questions about the new law the public can call (404) 657-3378 or email questions or concerns to gasmokefreeair@dhr.state.ga.us. More information can also be found at <http://www.dhr.georgia.gov/gasmokefreeair>.

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