American Cancer Society Survey Finds Many Smokers Make Last Minute Plans to Quit

Survey Results Show Lack of Awareness of Available Resources to Help Smokers Quit

ATLANTA 2009/11/12 -Although a majority of smokers want to quit smoking, many delay making a plan to quit until the last minute, according to a recent American Cancer Society online survey of people who say they want to. Twenty-two percent of smokers surveyed planned to quit within 24 hours, while 30 percent said they planned to quit within a week or two. The American Cancer Society stresses the importance of planning ahead to quit smoking as research shows that preparing for quitting by allowing enough time to get nicotine replacement therapy, and planning how to deal with cravings and tempting situations, greatly increases the likelihood of succeeding. The Society encourages smokers to use the annual occasion of the Great American Smokeout® on November 19 as a date to make a plan to quit, or to plan in advance and quit smoking that day.

“Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for you and your family,” said Regina Benjamin, M.D., M.B.A., U.S. Surgeon General. “No matter how long you have smoked, there are major and immediate benefits to quitting now. Within minutes of quitting your heart rate drops and within a day the carbon monoxide in your blood drops to normal. Within 2 weeks to three months, your risk for a heart attack decreases. The benefits only get better the longer you remain tobacco-free."

The survey, conducted via the Great American Smokeout Web site (www.cancer.org/GreatAmericans) also found that 76 percent of smokers surveyed did not know that they could receive free help from a tobacco cessation coach at a telephone quitline that is available to all smokers; and 77 percent have never called a quitline to get help with quitting smoking. Other survey findings include:

- most smokers surveyed (70.2 percent) were “somewhat” to “very much” interested in customized, tailored Web sites to help them quit
- many smokers surveyed (59 percent) were “somewhat” to “very much” interested in receiving e-mails that containing customized, professional advice about quitting and were received near their quit date
- thirty-three percent of survey respondents were not interested in using prescription medications for quitting smoking, which may be due to a lack of education about how nicotine replacement therapy and other cessation medications can at least double the chances of staying quit

“Our survey findings show that there is much work that still needs to be done in educating smokers about the most effective ways to quit,” said Elizabeth T.H. Fontham, M.P.H., Dr. P.H., president, American Cancer Society. “Smokers wishing to quit should seek out support from tobacco cessation coaches at state quitlines, from friends and family, and should understand the benefits of using medication to decide if it is right for them. The American Cancer Society hopes that smokers will use the Great American Smokeout on November 19 as the day to commit to a tobacco-free life. Doing so will help people stay well and celebrate more birthdays.”

Quitting smoking is one of the most important steps towards a healthier life – one that can lead to reducing cancer risk and creating more birthdays. Researchers say that quitting smoking can increase life expectancy – smokers who quit at age 35 gain an average of eight years of life expectancy; those who quit at age 55 gain about five years; and even long term smokers who quit at 65 gain three years . Smokers who want to quit can call the American Cancer Society Quit For Life® Program operated and managed by Free & Clear® at 1-800-227-2345 for tobacco cessation and coaching services that can help increase their chances of quitting for good.

The Great American Smokeout Web site (www.cancer.org/GreatAmericans) contains user-friendly tips and tools to help smokers create a smoke-free life. The site also offers downloadable desktop helpers to assist with planning to quit and succeeding in staying tobacco-free. The Quit Clock allows users to pick a quit day within 30 days, then counts down the selected day with tips for each day; and the Craving Stopper helps smokers beat

cravings by offering a fun distraction.

The American Cancer Society created the trademarked concept for and held its first Great American Smokeout in 1976 as a way to inspire and encourage smokers to quit for a day. The Great American Smokeout encourages smokers to commit to making a long-term plan to quit smoking for good.

Important facts about tobacco use:

- Tobacco use remains the single largest preventable cause of disease and premature death in the U.S.
- Cigarette smoking accounts for about 443,000 premature deaths – including 49,400 in nonsmokers.
- Thirty percent of cancer deaths, including 87 percent of lung cancer deaths, can be attributed to tobacco.
- Smoking accounts for $193 billion in health care expenditures and productivity losses.
- Adult smoking rates in the U.S. stood at 20.6 percent in 2008, moving up slightly from 2007. There is much progress still to be made in reducing tobacco use.

About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society combines an unyielding passion with nearly a century of experience to save lives and end suffering from cancer. As a global grassroots force of more than three million volunteers, we fight for every birthday threatened by every cancer in every community. We save lives by helping people stay well by preventing cancer or detecting it early; helping people get well by being there for them during and after a cancer diagnosis; by finding cures through investment in groundbreaking discovery; and by fighting back by rallying lawmakers to pass laws to defeat cancer and by rallying communities worldwide to join the fight. As the nation's largest non-governmental investor in cancer research, contributing about $3.4 billion, we turn what we know about cancer into what we do. As a result, about 11 million people in America who have had cancer and countless more who have avoided it will be celebrating birthdays this year. To learn more about us or to get help, call us any time, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 or visit cancer.org.

Claire Greenwell
Media Relations Specialist
American Cancer Society
404-417-5883
claire.greenwell@cancer.org