

## **B.C. communities join Madonna's quest for clean air**

Madonna took a firm stand with fans who were smoking near the stage at her December 19<sup>th</sup> concert in Santiago, Chile. "If you're going to smoke cigarettes, I'm not doing a show" she told the group of smokers at her sound-check before the concert. "I'm not kidding. I can't sing if you smoke... If you love me, don't smoke." With that, the pop star left the stage, only returning hours later to start the performance.

Blunt words from the Queen of Pop, who was wrapping up her highly successful six-month MDNA tour. After 86 concert dates, Madge might be forgiven for wanting to protect her million-dollar instrument: her voice. Her rant may have perplexed the crowd who were attending the performance at the Estadio Nacional, a huge open-air stadium in Santiago. Madonna has banned smoking at all her concerts, even in outdoor arenas and in those countries where smoking is still allowed in indoor public places.

Here in Canada, smoking in indoor public places is thankfully a thing of the past. Increasingly, communities across the country are strengthening outdoor restrictions as well. Outdoor smoking bylaws are in place in a number of B.C. municipalities such as Vancouver, Kelowna and Duncan, and are under consideration in several others.

Why ban smoking in outdoor areas like beaches, playgrounds, trails and parks? In addition to protecting people from harmful exposure to tobacco smoke, outdoor smoking bans lessen the environmental impact of forest fires, toxic litter and risks to wildlife.

Equally important, these bylaws are one of the most effective tools in de-normalizing tobacco use in communities. Youth who grow up in smoke-free communities are much less likely to start smoking, and those who do smoke find it easier to quit. Smoking bans are a major contributor to declines in B.C.'s smoking rate, consistently the lowest in the country, at 18%.

Municipalities that have enacted outdoor smoking restrictions have reported few issues. A Waterloo University study on an outdoor bylaw enacted in Woodstock Ontario in 2008 indicated success: smoking was reduced in restricted areas and support for the ban increased, especially among smokers.

Smoke free outdoor spaces not only protect Madonna's priceless pipes; they protect our children and our environment. It appears that the movement for smoke free outdoor spaces is taking hold. Wouldn't the Material Girl be proud!

To learn more about what you can do to encourage smoke-free public places in your community visit: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/tobac-tabac/sfpp-fslp/index-eng.php#below>

Author: Trish Hill is a Tobacco Reduction Coordinator with Interior Health  
Date: January 8, 2013