

## No butts about it!

### Smoke free outdoor bylaws protect communities.

Enjoying a summer picnic at a local park recently, I was surprised to see someone toss their cigarette butt into the long grass at the edge of the road as they left. Grumbling, a fellow picnicker collected the butt from the grass and doused it. "I don't know why smoking is allowed in this park," she said, pointing up to the tinder-dry forest stretching up the mountainside. "On a hot day like this, the whole place could go up in flames."

It's true - smoke free public places protect more than our health; they also reduce the risk of wild-fire. Cigarettes cause fires every year in B.C., many starting in the interface between communities and surrounding areas. Residents of the B.C. Interior became attuned to the risk of interface fires during the 2003 fire season. That year, fires destroyed 334 homes and businesses and forced the evacuation of 45,000 people. Although lightning was the major cause of the wildfires that year, smoker's materials were also a significant contributor. In fact, a discarded cigarette ignited the McClure fire near Barriere, destroying 72 homes and nine businesses including the major employer in the area. Cigarettes continue to be a top cause of fire in the province, but we can change that.

One important way to reduce the risk of fire between communities and forested areas is to prohibit smoking in local parks and trails. Community trail systems are often located on the perimeter of the community, close to dry forests and grassland. Parks are also vulnerable to fire in hot summer weather. Park and trail users who smoke may not be aware of the damage their discarded cigarette can cause. Local governments can reduce fire risk with a smoke free outdoor bylaw that protects these vulnerable areas and the community.

There is lots of support out there for smoke free outdoor bylaws. Eighty six per cent of British Columbians do not smoke so these bylaws align with our community norms. In one study, 93 per cent of non-smokers and 71 per cent of smokers agreed with restrictions on smoking in outdoor spaces and after the bylaw was implemented, support continued to increase.

More than 40 local governments in B.C. have adopted bylaws that restrict smoking in outdoor public places such as parks, playgrounds and trail systems. For more information about creating smoke free environments in your community, contact the Interior Health Tobacco Reduction program at [tobacco@interiorhealth.ca](mailto:tobacco@interiorhealth.ca), or see Plan H Tobacco at: <http://planh.ca/take-action/healthy-people/page/tobacco-reduction>.

Author: Trish Hill is a tobacco reduction coordinator with Interior Health.

Date: August 19, 2014