

**Subject:****ENCOURAGING A SMOKE-FREE  
ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS****Circular Number:****2004/1****Date of Issue:**

21 January 2004

**Target Audience:**

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment;
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland; and
- Teachers' Unions.

**Summary of Contents:**

The purpose of this circular is to encourage school authorities to implement policies which will ensure that the premises for which they are responsible are smoke-free environments.

**Enquiries:**

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**Governor Awareness:**

Essential

**Status of Contents:**

Advice

Guidance for schools

**Related Documents:****Superseded Documents:****Expiry Date:**

Not applicable

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## ENCOURAGING A SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS

One of the actions emanating from the Investing for Health strategy, which is supported by all Government Departments, was the publication in July 2003 of a five year Tobacco Action Plan 2003–2008 (the full text of the plan can be accessed at [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)). One of the actions contained in the plan is that schools should be encouraged to implement no smoking policies.

Tobacco is the largest single cause of premature death in the developed world and there is substantial evidence to show that exposure to other people's smoke is dangerous to health as well as being unpleasant and causing discomfort. Tobacco smoke contains five regulated hazardous air pollutants, 47 regulated hazardous wastes, more than 50 cancer causing agents and more than 100 chemical poisons. For many of the carcinogenic constituents, there is no safe level of exposure. Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) has calculated that in the UK each year there are about 600 deaths from lung cancer and up to 12,000 cases of heart disease in non smokers attributable to second hand tobacco smoke - these deaths are preventable.

Following distribution to schools by the Ulster Cancer Foundation of 1993 "Guidelines on Developing and Implementing a School Policy on Smoking" (due to be available at [www.ulstercancer.org](http://www.ulstercancer.org) from February 2004), a number of schools have developed a policy on smoking. In some schools, the entire premises may already be designated a smoke-free zone. However, other schools may operate policies permitting staff or visitors to smoke in designated areas. The purpose of this circular is to encourage all schools to put in place a policy that results in school premises being completely smoke-free.

There are increasing calls for the banning of smoking in all public places including workplaces, one of the latest being from the Royal College of Physicians. Their publication "Tobacco Smoke Pollution: the hard facts" can be viewed at [www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/books/smokefree/index.htm](http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/books/smokefree/index.htm). Generally, the main reason

for having a workplace environment which is totally smoke-free is to protect non-smokers from the damaging effects of “passive” or “second-hand” smoking. However in the school environment, where one of the aims is to educate children about healthy lifestyles, it is especially important that the premises should be smoke-free.

School children are taught about the dangers of smoking as part of the curriculum and it is very important that the environment in which they receive their education should be as healthy as those responsible for their education can make it. They are more likely to become smokers themselves if parents or friends smoke, or if they are exposed to role models who smoke. In order to set an appropriate example for our young people (as well as adults), it is therefore important that schools should aim to be completely smoke-free environments. The Department therefore encourages Principals and Boards of Governors to take a lead role by ensuring that children within their care are educated within a smoke-free environment.

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