



75D Van Horne Ave.
Dryden, ON P8N 2B2

May 16, 2013

Mayor and Council
Town of Fort Frances
320 Portage Avenue
Fort Frances, ON P9A 3M5

Dear Mayor and Council:

Re: Letter from Ontario Convenience Store Association about Contraband Tobacco

I am writing you regarding efforts by the Ontario Convenience Stores Association's (OCSA) to bring the issue of contraband tobacco to the attention of municipal councils in Ontario. For some time the OCSA and related organizations in Quebec and nationally in Canada have been calling on governments to exercise greater control over contraband tobacco and your council may have received a letter from the CEO of OCSA with a draft municipal resolution that your council could adopt to support the OCSA position on this issue.

Public health shares the objective of greater control by government over contraband tobacco but while reducing access to tobacco is a shared objective I would want to make a few points with respect to the OCSA's initiative that I hope you will consider when debating whether to support the OCSA with a council resolution:

- No type of tobacco product is safer than any other. Legally manufactured cigarettes sold through convenience stores are no safer than contraband cigarettes or any other type of tobacco product for that matter. Unlike other consumer products, tobacco industry products have *no safe level of use* and prematurely kill half of their long-time users when used exactly as intended. Nicotine addiction, whether through the use of contraband or legal cigarettes, is a difficult to break addiction which has often been compared to heroin or cocaine addiction.
- Most retailers, including those in the Northwestern Health Unit, do not sell cigarettes to young people, but a minority percentage still does. If the OCSA really wishes to address the issue of youth and access to tobacco, it should be advocating for disincentives like anyone found selling cigarettes to minors should lose their right to sell both cigarettes and lottery tickets. The OCSA could also agree to a reduction in the number of retail outlets selling this uniquely toxic and hazardous product, which is now sold through multiple locations in every community in Ontario.
- From time to time, the convenience store sector has advocated for a reduction in tobacco taxes as a means of addressing the contraband problem. It would be very important that this approach is *not* supported, as price has been shown by years of research to be the most effective means of reducing consumption especially among young people who are more price sensitive than adults.

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- The convenience store sector has also advocated that the solution is to have tobacco possession by minors be made illegal. This is a "blame the victim" strategy which attempts to put the responsibility for youth tobacco use on to young people instead of the adults who supply it. This is an unjust way to deal with the issue of youth smoking as many young people have no concept either of addiction or of the types of long-term health consequences of tobacco use when they begin to experiment with tobacco industry products.

I strongly encourage your Council to receive any submissions on the subject of contraband tobacco from the OCSA with great caution and to consider the motivation for wanting your support of their association. If your council would like to learn more about contraband tobacco and/or what the council can do to address the issue of youth smoking through municipal bylaw, we would be pleased to make a presentation to your council at a time convenient to you. Please feel free to contact me by phone 1-807-223-3301 ext. 3525 or email jmckibbon@nwhu.on.ca

Sincerely,



Jennifer McKibbon
Manager, Enforcement

c: Dr. James Arthurs, Medical Officer of Health
Mark Perrault, Chief Executive Officer