

## **Program: BE TOBACCO FREE – Put It Out Rockland! Young Lungs Are Saying: “We Wanna Be Tobacco Free!”**

Rockland County, NY, January 2008— It is now four years since the Be Tobacco Free program of Steps to a HealthierNY (Steps) started its outreach to the community. Such familiar programs and partners, including *Put It Out Rockland*, Reality Check, POW’R Against Tobacco Coalition, and the Rockland County Parks Department, have become part and parcel of our communal effort to curb the effects of tobacco on our health.

**FACT:** “Tobacco is often the first drug used by young people who go on to use alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs.” **Put it Out Rockland** offers programs that reduce tobacco use rates among youth, promote quitting among adults and youth, and reduce exposure to secondhand smoke.

An exciting part of the Steps program was started in the 3rd year, *Young Lungs At Play!*, an initiative to prevent exposure to tobacco in outdoor play spaces. The campaign encourages local municipalities, housing complexes, faith-based organizations and other community agencies to pass regulations banning tobacco use at outdoor spaces where children play. Adult smoking negatively impacts children by exposing them to secondhand smoke, increasing their potential to choke or burn themselves with lit cigarette butts, and encouraging negative health behavior when seeing adults smoke. The Rockland County Department of Health (DOH) and its collaborators supplied attractive and to-the-point signage for placement in playgrounds and other areas where children gather.

Of the 25 municipalities in Rockland County, 13 have adopted a resolution in support of *Young Lungs at Play*, creating 89 municipal tobacco-free zones across the county. In addition, 15 childcare centers, 11 apartment complexes, a day camp and one faith-based organization have joined in the campaign. They, together with many school districts, are posting the signs and increasing the visibility of anti-tobacco messages in the county. A total of 148 play areas in Rockland County have been designated as tobacco-free play zones—and the work is not over.

On many occasions it has been gratifying to watch smoking adults approaching play areas and, seeing the signage, put out their cigarettes. The results of a recent survey suggest that the majority of Rockland County residents support outdoor smoking bans, particularly in places where children play.

- 96.5% of persons surveyed said that secondhand smoke is harmful.
- 68.8 % of persons surveyed support regulation that prohibits smoking in outdoor public spaces in which children play such as playgrounds, fields and parks.
- 56.3% of persons surveyed said they would support regulation that prohibits smoking in other outdoor public spaces such as walking trails, pools or picnic areas.

Rockland residents have sent nearly 400 postcards urging their community leaders to adopt *Young Lungs at Play* to provide children with clean play areas and clean air. Another 500 postcards were sent by residents to town and village boards, thanking them for adopting a resolution in support of tobacco-free outdoor play spaces.

There has been a ground swell of interest generated by this program. Many communities around the country have already copied the plan and have taken similar action in their towns.

For more information call the Rockland County DOH at 845-364-2500  
or visit the STEPS website at [www.rocklandsteps.org](http://www.rocklandsteps.org)  
also visit: <http://www.co.rockland.ny.us/pior/index.shtml>