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LABOR UNIONS REACT TO SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT

TO NATIONAL DESK:

COALITION OF LABOR UNIONS REACTS TO SURGEON GENERAL'S
REPORT ON SMOKING

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16 /PRNewswire/ -- The presidents of five AFL-CIO unions today released a statement in response to a new Surgeon General's Report on the effects of involuntary smoking.

The international union presidents who signed the statement include the following:

- William W. Winpisinger, president, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.
- James L. Walker, president, International Brotherhood of Firemen and Oilers.
- John DeConcini, president, Bakery, Confectionary and Tobacco Workers International Union.
- Edward J. Carlough, president, Sheet Metal Workers International Association.
- Patrick J. Campbell, president, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America.

The union statement issued in response to the 1986 Surgeon General's Report is as follows:

The surgeon general is releasing a report today on the issue of involuntary smoking. The report concludes that secondary tobacco smoke causes lung cancer in non-smokers and that no amount of engineering controls such as improved ventilation can eliminate that hazard. The implication of the report is that all workers must be forced to stop smoking on the job site.

The accuracy of the surgeon general's conclusion on toxicity is for scientists to resolve. However, the surgeon general's relentless pursuit of a political agenda on the smoking issue calls into question much of his credibility. Last year, in his report on cigarette smoking and occupational disease in the workplace, the surgeon general launched a calculated attack on union efforts to force employers to clean up the workplace when he elevated smoking to the top of the list of OSHA problems and shifted the burden for safety and health to workers. In this year's report, he has gone one step further and asserts that involuntary smoking is a greater hazard than other toxins such as asbestos.

The assertion that any amount of environmental tobacco smoke is more toxic than a host of substances currently regulated by OSHA is both incredible and seriously undermines the efforts of our organizations to protect our members effectively.

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Moreover, the report's conclusion that no engineering controls can effectively deal with environmental tobacco smoke is one which concerns us greatly as trade unionists. We feel that this conclusion violates a fundamental tenet of federal workplace health and safety regulation which the labor movement has supported for decades. Under that regulatory principle, employers have always had the responsibility for cleaning up the workplace by implementing proper engineering controls. Once again, as in last year's report, the surgeon general is attempting to shift the burden for cleaning up the workplace to workers.

If environmental tobacco smoke is a hazard, it can be relieved in nearly all cases by improved ventilation. This will not only clear the workplace of tobacco smoke, but will also serve the more important goal of removing many of the other contaminants of the air quality to create a safe and healthy environment for all workers.

Outright prohibition of a behavior disapproved of by the surgeon general seems to be the goal of his conclusions. The denigration of improved engineering controls does a tremendous disservice to all workers concerned about safe and healthy work environments.

/CONTACT: Tom Donahue or Richard Marcus of Ogilvy and Mather, 202-456-7590, for the AFL-CIO/

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