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Local Students Campaign to Reduce Youth Tobacco Use *A New Surgeon General Report Indicates, "More Work Needs To Be Done"*

STOCKTON, CA (April 30, 2012) "More work needs to be done" to keep young Americans from using tobacco, according to a recently released report from the Office of the Surgeon General. The report finds despite the decrease in teen smoking rates from earlier decades, nearly 1 in 5 high school-age youth uses tobacco. In a recent interview with the Associated Press, U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin cited the need to focus on preventing the epidemic of youth tobacco use in order to make the next generation tobacco-free.

The Surgeon General's new report is the first comprehensive analysis of youth tobacco use since the first report in 1994. The over 900 page report found the prevalence rate for youth smoking declined from 27.5 percent to 19.5 percent – approximately 3 million students – but the rate of decline has slowed in recent years.

"Several factors influence youth smoking," said Ina Collins, Program Coordinator for the San Joaquin County Public Health Services Tobacco Control Program. "Family members who use tobacco, social pressure from peers, and tobacco product advertising all have a powerful impact." According to the *Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids'* website, more than a third of all kids who ever try smoking a cigarette become regular, daily smokers before leaving high school.

Many high school students in San Joaquin County are committed to doing "more work" to reduce tobacco use in youth. In partnership with San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services Students in Prevention and Friday Night Live Programs since 2007, the Tobacco Control Program provides local students with advocacy training and opportunities to educate their peers about the dangers of tobacco use. Through the *Tobacco in Entertainment* project, students from schools throughout San Joaquin County volunteer to promote awareness of tobacco content in PG-rated movies that target children and youth audiences.

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Recent activities include a letter-writing campaign to the Motion Picture Association of America to advocate that all new movies with tobacco content be rated “R” unless the major character portrays an actual figure – current or historical – who smoked. Other recent activities include creating anti-tobacco Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to promote the statewide smokers’ quit hotline, 1-800-540-6775. Two youth-developed educational PSAs will run for 15 weeks on a popular radio station and the second in a series of 30-second video PSAs will soon hit local theater screens in 3 major theater chains.

For more information on the local Tobacco Control Program activities, please visit the San Joaquin County Public Health Services website at http://www.sjcphs.org/healthed/health_education_community_resources.aspx or call 468-2411.

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Attached Background Documents:

1. A Report of the Surgeon General Executive Summary, “Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults”
2. Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, “The Path to Smoking Addiction Starts at Very Young Ages”