



NEWS RELEASE
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Lawrence youth to celebrate anti-tobacco Kick Butts Day

(Lawrence) – Several Lawrence kids and teens will spend part of their spring break this week drawing attention to the harmful effects of tobacco use and picking up cigarette butts in downtown Lawrence.

“It’s important for our kids growing up in the Lawrence community to be aware that what we see in advertisements applies everywhere. Tobacco ads are targeting kids in Lawrence,” said Ruth Gathunguri, a Free State High School senior and member of the Lawrence chapter of Resist, a youth-led tobacco prevention initiative.

March 20 is the official national Kick Butts Day, an annual celebration of youth leadership and activism in the fight against tobacco use. The Lawrence chapter of Resist and Boys & Girls Club of Lawrence will hold a local Kick Butts Day event at 10 a.m. Thursday, March 14, in South Park for teens and BGCLK elementary students. They will leave a flag in all the places they found and removed toxic cigarette butts. The youth will also disperse and pickup cigarette butts on Massachusetts Streets in downtown.

“As a community, a lot of people go downtown and there likely will be people out during spring break,” said Gathunguri, who is also a BGC staff member at the Sunset Hill Elementary site. “If you see a mass of kids picking up cigarette butts, it’s an opportunity to be teaching them about the significance of smoking in our community.”

The Boys & Girls Club of Lawrence and Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department received a mini-grant of \$500 to hold the Kick Butts Day event from Resist, a statewide tobacco prevention initiative. The Lawrence group was one of 12 youth groups across Kansas that received funding for a local event.

Throughout March, youth advocates across the state will organize local events to educate youth about the dangers of smoking and using e-cigarettes, and to encourage lawmakers to pass policies that prevent children and youth from access to tobacco products and exposure to secondhand smoke. The month-long awareness event kicked off on March 7 with Kick Butts Day at the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka, held by the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and Resist. Kick Butts Day was created by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and was first held in 1996. Over 1,000 Kick Butts Day events are planned during the month of March in the United States and across the world.

Sarah Hartsig, Health Promotion Specialist at the Health Department, said the Lawrence group is also using the month to raise awareness about the use of flavored e-cigarettes

to target youth. The Health Department is running an advertising campaign through April on the dangers of flavored tobacco.

“Flavors are used in marketing towards kids, and 81% of youth who use a tobacco product started with a flavored one,” Hartsig said. “There are thousands of different flavors of e-cigarettes on the market today, and flavors are a strategy of big tobacco to get youth to use their products.”

Gretchen Bannwarth, a freshman at Lawrence High School and member of Resist, added, “Almost every life-long cigarette smoker starts smoking cigarettes before the age of 18, which is why it is crucial that we stop the problem before it starts. In order for us to achieve the goal of being the first tobacco-free generation, we need to educate and empower our peers.”

For information on the national initiative, visit www.kickbuttsday.org. Resist is a statewide, youth-led tobacco prevention initiative. Resist Chapters from across the state of Kansas are working to educate their peers, advocate for tobacco-free policies, and de-normalize tobacco use. For more information on Resist, visit www.resisttobacco.org.

About the Boys & Girls Club of Lawrence

The Boys & Girls Club serves more than 1,500 kids per day from various racial, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. The BGCLK supports single parents, working parents, guardians, grandparents and positive mentors committed to their child receiving quality afterschool programming.

About the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department

The nationally accredited Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department has served the Lawrence and Douglas County community for more than 120 years. Its mission is to advance policies, practices and programs that promote health for all, prevent disease and protect the environment.

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