



NEWS RELEASE

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The Utah Department of Health Introduces the Adult Tobacco Quit Line with a Touch of “Reality” to help Utahns Quit Smoking

(Salt Lake City, UT) — Utah adults who are struggling to quit smoking can now find help and resources by dialing a free telephone number – 1-888-567-TRUTH (8788)– the new Utah Tobacco Quit Line launched today by the Utah Department of Health’s (UDOH) Tobacco Prevention and Control Program.

In an innovative twist, the UDOH will promote the new Utah Tobacco Quit Line through a “reality-style” series of commercials that focus on Utahns who want to quit smoking. The television campaign, which will begin airing this week, follows the participants as they work to stop smoking, look for alternative behaviors and deal with the life changes that quitting creates. The campaign will target the approximately 200,000 Utah adults who currently smoke.

The participants, representing a range of ages and backgrounds, agreed to take part in the eight-week program in mid-August. The “stars” are not being paid for their participation, except for mileage and other incidental expenses related to filming during the cessation period. Participants have agreed to make their lives open to the public during the cessation program by detailing the effects that kicking the habit has on them, their families and their friends.

“These individuals are brave for putting themselves out in front like this and having the public watch and follow their progress,” said Rod Betit, UDOH executive director. “We’ve chosen to use real people because we want smokers to identify with them and know that anyone can do this.”

Betit emphasized that successfully and permanently quitting is the hopeful outcome but expects that there will be trials and hurdles in quitting like relapsing, quitting again, and finding useful alternatives to kick the habit. The reality spots will portray these trials as they are happening.

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"The average smoker makes seven quit attempts before they are successful. That's the point of the series; you should never quit quitting," says Heather Borski, Utah Tobacco Quit Line Coordinator.

The smokers, scheduled to be introduced at today's press conference, include Mark Evans, an 18-year-old gymnastics coach from Sandy; Heidi Harris, a 38-year-old wildlife rehabilitator from Salt Lake; Jeremy Haslam, a 24-year old truck driver from Tooele; Kenny Johnson, a 20-year-old gas station attendant from West Jordan; Kristina Lehrer, a 28-year-old nurse from Salt Lake; Barbie Peterson, a 54-year-old cashier from West Jordan and Bob Pollei, a 62-year-old employee of Delta Airlines from Salt Lake. The participants have smoked for periods ranging from three to 42 years.

The seven stars will be filmed once or twice a week for regular television commercials updates that will be aired about their crusade to quit smoking. The seven will also appear in news specials and other documentaries about the Utah Tobacco Quit Line. Each commercial will end with information about the Utah Tobacco Quit Line and a message that encourages tobacco users who are watching to make a call for help to quit.

At today's news conference, a program participant placed the inaugural call to the new Utah Tobacco Quit Line. The Quit Line is now in operation Monday through Thursday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The Utah Tobacco Quit Line offers live tobacco cessation counseling, as well as referrals to additional services, state-of-the-art cessation booklets and kits filled with quitting aids such as gum, straws, nail files and pens. This strategy has been proven successful with the October 2000 launch of the Teen Tobacco Quit Line. To date, more than 1,200 calls were (of those who responded to a follow up survey) 43 percent of teens reported 30-day sustained abstinence.

Eligible persons interested in quitting can speak with a trained cessation specialist and can choose to receive follow-up calls over a three to four month period. Callers wanting additional follow up will be referred to local resources.