

The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco Responds to Quebec Tax Increase

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Ottawa, February 9, 2023 - The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco's (NCACT) responded to the Government of Quebec's eight dollar increase on cartons of cigarettes sold in the province.

"While we commend the government for taking a prudent approach to tobacco taxation over the past years, an immediate 27% increase on the cost of cigarettes in the province will shock the market and lead many to seek out the illegal market," began Rick Barnum, Executive Director of the NCACT and the former Deputy Commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police.

In the 2021 federal budget, an immediate increase in tobacco taxation was also passed. In response, the Parliamentary Budget Officer report found that the tax increase would not increase government revenue, but would have an impact on growing the contraband tobacco market.

"History shows that surprise tobacco tax increases do not increase government revenues and drive smokers to the illegal market. This tax increase will have a direct impact on increasing the organized crime activity related to contraband tobacco in Quebec in a similar way to what we are seeing in British-Columbia. Per a Canadian Press article, the province of BC has seen all-time high contraband tobacco rate since the introduction of a tax increase on tobacco," continued Barnum.

The RCMP continues to estimate that over 175 organized crime groups are trafficking in contraband tobacco across Canada, with over 50 illegal factories in Ontario and Quebec creating millions of illegal cigarettes an hour. The millions of dollars made every day from illegal cigarettes funds other illicit activities, such as drugs, guns, and human trafficking.

NCACT is not against tobacco taxation, but maintains that this aggressive fiscal policy will create a market shock that could very well lead tobacco consumption towards contraband products.

NCACT supports proportionate and predictable tax on excisable goods. As an example, the federal government has largely implemented an inflationary based, predictable regime. Unpredictable and excessive increases of this nature are likely to have unintended consequences of driving law abiding consumers to illegal tobacco products, and undermine the health objective it aims to achieve.

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The National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco is a Canadian advocacy group formed by organizations and associations concerned about the growing danger of contraband cigarettes. NCACT members share the goals of working together to educate people and urge government to take quick action to stop this growing threat. More information about the Coalition can be found on our website, www.stopcontrabandtobacco.ca.

Media Contact:
Kyle Larkin, NCACT Public Affairs
Telephone: 905-449-9077
Email: info@stopcontrabandtobacco.ca

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