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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Beltrami County Smoke-Free Ordinance Has Significantly Improved Indoor Air Quality, Study Reports

On First Anniversary of Smoke-Free Ordinance, New Study Shows Even Cleaner Air is Only a Year Away

(Bemidji, MN) 01/11/06 – January 1st marked the one-year anniversary of the implementation of Beltrami County’s smoke-free ordinance, and there is good news to report. Local bars and restaurants had a 96 percent reduction in harmful indoor air pollutants from secondhand smoke during nonsmoking periods. However, during allowed smoking periods between 8 p.m. and 3 a.m., employees and patrons are still exposed to air pollution that is nearly double the *annual* exposure level recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency, according to a study released today by The Beltrami Tobacco Education Awareness Movement (B-TEAM).

According to a study that was reported in the Journal of American Medical Association, even 30 minutes of secondhand smoke exposure compromised the coronary artery function of non-smokers in a way that was indistinguishable from the harm experienced by smokers.

The Minneapolis-based Center for Energy and Environment monitored pollutants in the air of six Beltrami County bars and restaurants, and compared air pollution before and after the 8:00 p.m. deadline. Results indicate that the current ordinance has dramatically reduced Beltrami County residents’ exposure to harmful secondhand smoke during the nonsmoking period. The policy’s comprehensive benefits won’t begin until January 1, 2007, when the current exemption expires and the ordinance becomes effective 24 hours a day.

“This study supports the use of comprehensive smoke-free ordinances as a way to offer truly cleaner air for people to breathe,” said Jim Heltzer, Beltrami County Commissioner. “The current policy is a step in the right direction. But we are even more excited that one year from now all Beltrami County bar and restaurant employees will have a far healthier workplace – at anytime, day or night.”

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Pollutants measured in the study contain known cancer-causing agents that are inhaled deeply into the lungs, where they can cause significant health damage for both smokers and non-smokers alike. Secondhand smoke is more than an annoyance; it is a serious health hazard causing the deaths of 38,000 nonsmokers each year. Secondhand smoke is a known cause of heart disease, lung cancer, chronic respiratory ailments and low birth weights. “By its very nature, smoke drifts, and the toxins contained within it linger, especially in closed environments,” said Marti Lundin, Executive Director for the B-TEAM. “Because of the leadership of the County Board, however, 2006 brings Beltrami County residents halfway there to clearing the air.”

In addition to the cleaner air, another benefit of smoke-free policies is that they contribute to the sense that tobacco use for youth is no longer socially acceptable. A recent survey released by the Minnesota Department of Health shows that smoking among Minnesota’s high school students has dropped by 31%, while 6th through 8th graders enjoyed an even more dramatic 43% decline. “The B-TEAM is proud that Beltrami County is supporting our children with a smoke-free future,” said Lundin.

The ordinance is supported by a large majority of the public, with 84 percent of Beltrami County residents stating that secondhand smoke is a health hazard during a June 2005 opinion poll conducted by the Washington D.C. based Mellman Group.

Funding for the study was provided through a grant from the Minnesota Partnership for Action Against Tobacco.

PRESS CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11TH, GREAT WALL BUFFET, BEMIDJI, AT 1 PM. COMPLIMENTARY LUNCH PROVIDED AT 12:30.

AIR QUALITY MEASUREMENTS TAKEN FROM SIX BELTRAMI COUNTY VENUES ON AUGUST 26-28 ‘05

The Beltrami Tobacco Education Awareness Movement is the premier non-profit organization in northern Minnesota dedicated to reducing youth tobacco use and creating smoke-free environments. For more information see: www.smokefreebeltrami.org or call 218-751-9224