

Yurok Join War on Tobacco with unprecedented policy

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Acting in a move to “safeguard public health and preserve the health of the most vulnerable members,” the Yurok Tribe adopted historic commercial tobacco-free policy.

The Yurok Tobacco Responsibility Ordinance differs from other Tribal commercial policies and mandates the following:

- All commercial tobacco products- cigarettes, vapes, chew and emerging Tobacco products are prohibited.
- Comprehensive protection in both indoor and outside spaces.
- Rigorous regulations on litter (cigarette butts) aimed at reducing tobacco-related waste.
- Strict smoking limitations near areas frequented by children.

Yurok traditional tobacco use is exempted from the Ordinance.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has provided the funding to enforce the Responsibility Ordinance through the United Indian Health Service (UIHS). CEO Liz O’Rourke praised the smoke-free policy. “ The Yurok Tribe has taken the dangers of commercial tobacco, vaping and second hand smoke seriously and chosen to protect their citizens,” said O’Rourke.

The Yurok Tribal Council released a statement, “...the Ordinance exemplifies the exercise of Tribal sovereignty to address public health challenges posed by commercial tobacco uses, which remains the number one cause of preventable death.”

The War on Tobacco use spans over a half-century. Tobacco Use has declined from 43 percent in 1964 to an estimated 14 percent in 2020, according to the Surgeon General. In 1998, the tobacco industry settled litigation and agreed to the Master Settlement Agreement against the four largest tobacco companies also known as the Majors, Phillip Morris, R.J Reynolds, Brown and Williamson and Lorillard, a minimum of \$206 billion over the ensuing 25 years. The settlement compensated 46 states. Florida, Minnesota, Texas and Mississippi negotiated individual settlements. The Master Agreement funding continues currently.