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American Heart Association Unveils Smoke-free Cities Policy to Protect Citizens from Dangers of Secondhand Smoke

(Washington, April 30, 2007) –The American Heart Association today announced that it will no longer hold conferences in cities without smoke-free workplace laws as part of an ongoing campaign to reduce cardiovascular diseases related to tobacco use. The Board of Directors approved the policy which represents a significant change in the association’s meeting and conference site selection process.

“The American Heart Association has long advocated for smoke-free workplace ordinances at the state and local levels,” said American Heart Association Board Chairman Andrew B. Buroker. “We are equally committed to protecting the health of our staff and volunteers by providing smoke-free environments for Association-sponsored meetings and conferences.”

Secondhand smoke kills an estimated 38,000 Americans annually, 35,000 of which are from heart disease. Thirty minutes of exposure to secondhand smoke stiffens coronary arteries, slowing the flow of blood to the heart muscle, making a person much more susceptible to a heart attack. The U.S. Surgeon General confirmed that secondhand smoke exposure can increase a nonsmoker’s risk for heart disease by up to 30 percent.

The overwhelming evidence of the health consequences of secondhand smoke exposure has prompted lawmakers to pass smoke-free workplace legislation and as a result, 55 percent of the United States is now covered by smoke-free laws.

“We can no longer excuse holding meetings in smoky localities that could put staff, volunteers and visitors at risk for cardiovascular diseases,” said Buroker. “In order to save many lives, the American Heart Association strongly believes that the nation’s indoor public places should be 100 percent smoke-free.”

The policy goes into effect on May 1, 2007 for American Heart Association conferences. It requires all meetings and conferences organized or sponsored by the association to be held in communities that have enacted smoke-free workplace laws by a state law or local ordinance. The association’s annual Scientific Sessions conference has an average attendance of 30,000 and has been held in smoke-free cities for the past two years. The 2007 conference will be held in Orlando, Florida, this fall. The association’s previous policy prohibited smoking at meetings, conferences and office buildings.

The American Heart Association also advocates for cigarette excise tax increases and comprehensive state tobacco control prevention and treatment programs. On the federal level, it strongly supports the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, bipartisan legislation that would give the Food and Drug Administration authority to regulate the manufacture, sale, distribution, labeling and promotion of tobacco products. For more information, visit www.americanheart.org/fdatobacco

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