

## **HEALTH GROUPS OPPOSE A TOBACCO TRUST FUND**

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Several health organizations oppose a measure on the Nov. 7 election ballot that would place a good share of Utah's tobacco settlement dollars into a constitutionally protected trust fund.

The American Heart Association, American Cancer Society and Coalition for Tobacco-Free Utah say the fund is "fiscally irresponsible" because it ignores the need to bolster anti-smoking programs now.

"Proposition 2 would do nothing to ensure that the state's tobacco settlement funds are used for their intended purpose, which is to help prevent tobacco use and its deadly effects on Utahns," Dr. Brett Lazar, a former Weber-Morgan Health Department officer, said at a news conference Tuesday.

"We understand the arguments for putting the tobacco settlement money in a trust fund," said Joy Erickson, director of advocacy and communication for American Heart Association. "But what about solving today's health problems? What about the thousands of Utah children who take up smoking every year?"

Some 8,000 Utah teenagers begin smoking annually, she said. More than 1,200 Utahns die from cigarette-induced diseases each year, and smoking-related medical costs reach about \$210 million per year, including \$34 million in taxpayer-funded Medicaid.

Passage of the proposition would take away the public's control over the settlement dollars, said Beverly May, American Cancer Society advocacy director and a Democratic candidate for the Utah House. The amendment would create a loophole "big enough for lawmakers to steal it away to the general fund" for use as they see fit, she said.

Lazar said the "shortsighted" approach also fails to recognize the ongoing needs in smoking prevention programs, "so each year the battle gets fought anew."