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Smoke Free Mumbai spreads tobacco control campaign in Ganesh Mandals

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The Smokefree Mumbai Campaign, in association with Brihanmumbai Sarvajanik Ganesh Utsav Coordination Committee would be organizing a contest during the 10-day long Ganesh Chaturthi starting from September 1 to September 10 to heighten the awareness of the public on the health hazards of tobacco consumption.

The contest is divided into four criteria's namely 'Theme/Decoration of the Mandal, 'Presence of Tobacco Free Signage', 'Special Tobacco Control Related Activities during the festival' and 'Absence of direct or surrogate tobacco advertisements'. As part of the contest, out of the 12,000 mandals which display the most effective tobacco control message can bag the first prize which is a cash prize of Rs. 25,000/- while the first and second runners-up in all would take home Rs 15,000 and Rs 10,000 respectively.

Decorations or activities related to a social cause, Special tobacco control related activities, screening a video or enacting a street play with tobacco control messages would earn the most points. Another scale for judgment would be 'Absence of surrogate tobacco advertisement' i.e. the mandal that does not encourage direct or surrogate tobacco ads within 500 mts radius would get maximum points .

According to Dr Shastri, HOD Preventive Oncology, Tata Memorial Hospital and Chairperson Smokefree Mumbai Campaign, "The Ganesh mandals attract people in large numbers during the festival and it is a great platform to increase the awareness among the people about the ill effects of tobacco consumption. In the past, mandals have been largely dependent on tobacco companies for sponsorship, although currently there is a ban, some mandals violate the norms and display direct or indirect tobacco ads. On behalf of Smokefree Mumbai, I appeal to all Mandals not to advertise tobacco products during the 10-day festival and refuse offers from tobacco manufacturers and dealers for sponsorships in lieu of advertisements or exhibits promoting tobacco related products.

Advocate Naresh Dahibhavkar, President BrihanMumbai Sarvajanik Ganeshutsav coordination committee says, "The efforts and initiatives taken by various tobacco control advocates are highly appreciated. I completely support the Smokefree Mumbai campaign initiative and request the members of all the Ganesh Mandals to support the cause and spread the awareness by participating in the competition.

India has the highest incidence of oral cancer in the world which is directly attributable to tobacco use. Smoking is the most important risk factor for heart attacks and related deaths. Smoking takes its toll on not just the person who smokes directly but also on those around them.

Mandals interested in participating should register themselves with Smoke Free Mumbai Campaign between 1st to 10 September 2010.

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Time: 10 am to 4 pm (Monday to Friday)

About Smokefree Mumbai campaign:

The Smokefree Mumbai campaign was launched on February 20, 2009 by the Action Council against Tobacco-India (ACT-India) along with partners, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (M.C.G.M), Tata Memorial Hospital,

Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, Salaam Bombay Foundation, Cancer Patients Aid Association, V-CARE, Tata Steel (Wires Division), Tata Chemicals Limited, AHAR & Americares, to ensure the implementation of the national legislation passed on October 2, 2008 for smoke-free public places. The key objectives of the campaign are to ensure compliance with the existing national law, monitor violations and mobilize support from stakeholders, i.e., policy makers, organizations and civil society. For further details on the campaign, visit www.smokefreemumbai.org