

David Tilson, MP ? Federal government is cracking down on contraband tobacco

One of the four priorities our government has established is our Plan for Safe Streets and Communities, which focuses on tackling crime, victims' rights, as well as fair and efficient justice.

We've been continually taking action to deliver real results on this Plan because this is a priority for Canadians and their families. Earlier this month, we took further action by increasing efforts to keep contraband tobacco out of Canadian markets and the hands of Canadian children.

Contraband tobacco is a serious and pressing problem, which needs to be kept off of our streets and out of our communities. The availability of inexpensive, illegal tobacco, as well as cheap baggies of illegal cigarettes, can lure our children into smoking. We all recognize the negative impact smoking can have on their health and as Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq recently stated, "tobacco use continues to be the most preventable cause of premature death in Canada."

Therefore, our government will continue to support Canadians in their efforts to stop smoking and by taking swift action to remove contraband tobacco from the streets, and we're taking another step to keep it out of the hands of our children and protecting their health.

In addition to the negative impact contraband tobacco can have on the health of Canadians, it poses a serious threat to the public safety of Canadians, our communities and our economy. It aids the growth of organized criminal activity and as Public Safety Minister Vic Toews recently pointed out, "to the increased availability of illegal drugs and guns in our communities." Minister Toews and Minister Aglukkaq took action March 5 to address the problem posed by contraband tobacco by establishing a 50-officer RCMP Anti-Contraband Force, as well as creating a new Criminal Code offence with mandatory penalties of imprisonment for repeat offenders. The bill aims to target individuals whose activities involve the sale, offer of sale, possession for the purpose of the sale, transportation, distribution, or delivery of contraband tobacco, including high volume amounts of contraband tobacco. The maximum penalty for a first offence would be six months imprisonment on summary conviction and five years imprisonment if prosecuted on indictment.

The bill also proposes mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment for repeat offenders where a high volume of tobacco products is involved:

- ? 90 days incarceration on a second conviction;
- ? 180 days incarceration on a third conviction; and
- ? Two years less a day on subsequent convictions.

The aim of the RCMP Anti-Contraband Force is to reduce the contraband tobacco market and to fight organized criminal networks. The Force will focus on criminal groups who produce and distribute contraband tobacco, thus reducing the contraband tobacco market. The initiative compliments the existing RCMP Contraband Tobacco Enforcement Strategy, as well as building on existing federal enforcement measures.

Canada is an established world leader in tobacco control and we will continue our efforts to combat contraband tobacco and the criminal activity affiliated with it, which threatens both the health and safety of Canadians. The measures recently announced by our government take action against this problem, while also sending a clear message to those involved in trafficking: contraband tobacco isn't welcome or tolerated in Canada.

