

GROUP URGES PROVINCE TO ACT ON CONTRABAND TOBACCO

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Representatives from the National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco (NCACT) say illegal cigarettes continue to be a problem in Halton and are calling for better laws to halt their manufacture and distribution.

Gary Grant, spokesperson for the advocacy group, stopped by Oakville on Tuesday, Aug. 27 to talk to the media about the dangers of the contraband cigarette trade.

The 39-year veteran of the Toronto Police Service and founder of Toronto Crime Stoppers noted that while the sale of contraband cigarettes is a problem across the country, the epicentre of illegal tobacco is Ontario.

In Halton, Grant said, 25-30 per cent of the ciga-

rettes consumed are illegally manufactured contraband cigarettes.

"The Ontario government is losing about \$750 million a year in provincial taxes due to the contraband trade," said Grant.

"Also, the people that are selling the contraband cigarettes don't care who they sell it to. They don't worry about the age restrictions. They will sell a 12-year-old kid a baggy of cigarettes for the price of a movie ticket."

Grant said another problem with illegally produced cigarettes is that organized crime uses them as a way of funding more serious criminal activities such as drug trafficking and illegal firearms dealing.

He noted that according to the RCMP there are 175 criminal gangs involved in the contraband cigarette

trade.

"People think this is victimless crime, but it is a big crime and it is going on right here in our own community," said Grant.

"We are urging the Provincial government to do something about it."

NCACT has been meeting with the Province over the last year and has recommended Ontario pass legislation similar to that seen in Quebec.

Grant said Quebec previously had a problem with contraband tobacco, but then passed laws authorizing all police officers in Quebec to enforce the tobacco excise laws.

He said Quebec also created a task force of 54 officers dedicated to tackling the contraband tobacco fight and provided consistent funding to deal with the issue.

These changes, Grant



Randy Risting / Toronto Star

National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco calling for action on illegal cigarette trade in Ontario.

said, resulted in contraband cigarette sales in Quebec dropping by 50 per cent.

NCACT had expected to see Ontario legislation dealing with contraband cigarettes in the spring budget and say they were disappointed when this did not emerge.

"We're urging the Progressive Conservative Government not to drop the ball on this," said Grant.

"We want them to get moving on the file and do what they said they would do in the fall."

NCACT is made up of 14 members including Toron-

to Crime Stoppers, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Tobacco Manufacturer's Council and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

For more information visit <https://www.stop-contrabandtobacco.ca>.

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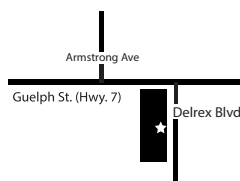
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