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## **GROUP WANTS TO MAKE COUNTY TOBACCO-FREE**

*By Tom O'Dare*

Horry County—In a county where tobacco is still a viable crop and where restaurants and hotels depend on tourists, many of whom still smoke, Larry White of the BREATHE coalition admits that Horry County poses a pretty tough fight.

BREATHE, which stands for Breathe Real Earth Air Throughout Horry Everyday, is a coalition of health workers and others who would like to see public places in Horry County become smoke-free.

White, who works for the Department of Health and Environmental Control, said the coalition emerged from other groups that were started to get young people to stop smoking.

“One of our biggest aims,” White said, “is to make sure schools have a policy that forbids tobacco use on campus. With the new law that makes it illegal for anyone under 18 to possess cigarettes, it should be easier for the schools to set up policies that make for smoke-free environments.”

White said one of the biggest challenges is to make sure the schools have a common-sense approach to the problem.

“It wouldn’t be right for the kids to face a fine and be suspended so there needs to be some policy that that’s a deterrent but also fair as well,” he said.

The goal of BREATHE goes beyond schools. The goal, ultimately, is to get public facilities to be as smoke-free as possible.

Several national chains of hotels and restaurants in the area have already become smoke-free properties.

The cities of Greenville, Sullivan’s Island and Columbia have passed laws banning smoking in public facilities, White said. Columbia has exempted bars from the ban.

In Horry County, DHEC restaurant inspectors are conducting surveys to determine how many businesses either allow smoking or to what percent do they restrict the practice in the building.

White said there is a broad spectrum of coalition members and more members are always being sought to further the cause.

For more information on the coalition, its efforts or meeting times, call White at 333.9751 or Raphael Carr at 365.8884.