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Non-Smoking Harmful to Treasury

THE good news is we are using less tobacco, and a lot of people are enjoying it more.

The bad news is the big drop in smoking may disappoint tax collectors and government spenders.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that consumption of all tobacco products this year may be the lowest in 46 years.

Cigarette smoking is going down for the sixth straight year and consumption of chewing tobacco and snuff is in its seventh straight yearly increase. However, chewing won't offset the decline in smoking because places without ash trays aren't likely to provide places to spit.

Tobacco is grown by some 400,000 farms, mostly in the Carolina-Virginia area. The crop requires nearly 100 times as many man-hours per acre as wheat but yields a much higher per acre return.

Defenders of the tobacco industry say government money is provided to growers only as price support

loans, to be repaid with interest after crops are sold. One spokesman notes the government has lost only \$52 million over the entire history of the program.

During the same 44 years, purchasers of tobacco have paid the U.S. Treasury more than \$68 billion in tobacco taxes and state governments collected an additional \$46 billion in tobacco taxes.

As smokers have switched to low-tar brands of cigarettes, manufacturers have shifted investments into food and other lines of merchandise. Spokesmen say they aren't going to stand for their industry to be destroyed, but they are diversifying, just in case.

The 1979 Oklahoma legislature raised the tax on cigarettes to nearly a penny apiece, expecting to collect over \$20 million a year. If enough Oklahomans become non-smokers, it could force a tax cut!

Each cigarette package carries a warning that smoking may be injurious to the smoker's health.

Health experts say smoking is a far more significant factor in the risk of heart disease than what we eat.

Stores and offices have posted signs asking people not to smoke. Municipalities prohibit smoking in certain places. Non-smokers boldly ask smokers to refrain from lighting up in their presence.

The Oklahoma Lung Association is campaigning for strict prohibition of cigarette smoking on school grounds, from kindergarten through high school, even including teachers!

Airplane stewardesses and restaurant hostesses steer customers into tobacco-segregated seating so tactfully that few complain of discrimination.

However, one disgruntled traveler griped that when he enters death's door, he expects someone to ask him: "Smoking or non-smoking?" The seating could affect one's enjoyment.