



## **N.C. Commercial Tobacco-Free Tribes**

# **KEEP TOBACCO SACRED:**

## **Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation Passes a Commercial Tobacco-free resolution, becoming the fourth N.C. tribe to do so.**

### **Summary:**

Working in partnership with the Tobacco Prevention & Control Branch, NC Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Human Services, the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation (OBSN) in Alamance County passed a resolution on October 18, 2018 deeming tribal grounds free of commercial tobacco usage including e-cigarettes.

### **Challenge:**

American Indians make up approximately two percent of North Carolina's population. The state's population of American Indians is estimated to nearly 120,000. American Indian adults have higher cigarette smoking rates than the general population, which puts them at increased risk for cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, lung diseases and other health problems caused by smoking. In North Carolina 26.2 percent of American Indian adults reported being current smokers, compared with 17.9 percent of all adults. Many American Indian tribal people have a spiritual relationship with tobacco and believe traditional tobacco was given to them by the Creator to use for healing and prayer. Preparation, planting and care of tobacco is a sacred process led by tribal elders. Although each tribe may differ in ceremony (i.e. language, song and prayer), most view tobacco as sacred. From the first steps of ground preparation through harvesting to drying, each process is important and great care is provided through prayer and song in many tribal cultures. No pesticides or chemicals are added as the commercial tobacco industry does. Sacred tobacco has many purposes and is used for protection, purification and blessings. The smoke carries prayers upward to the Creator and tobacco is often given as a gift to honor or give thanks. An important fact to remember is tobacco was not to be abused or used for gratification and pleasure; therefore, it was only used for ceremonies (not a daily event) and not inhaled. Many North Carolina tribal people have a history of growing commercial tobacco that they sold to support their families, making it an economic necessity at least until recent years. Competing health issues and economic worries make commercial tobacco prevention a difficult challenge.

### **Solution:**

The Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation recognized the harm that smoking has on tribal members and realized the harm secondhand smoke has on children and others. The tribe wanted to address the dangers of discarded cigarette litter as a fire risk and a poison risk to children if ingested. The tribe drafted a tobacco-free resolution and designed the tobacco free signs. All materials are tribe-specific and designed in a fashion to honor the traditional use of tobacco. The language makes it clear that only commercial tobacco use is prohibited. The OBSN recognizes the importance of balance and well-being and chose to make the decision to pass a resolution as a commitment to the health of its tribal members and visitors alike. Tobacco Control

Region 5 purchased signs for the tribal grounds near Burlington, NC and the ancient village in Hillsborough, NC.

**Results:** As a result of the grounds becoming tobacco-free we soon had two tribe members quit smoking. Both realized what smoking was doing to their health and loved ones. The OBSN is confident that more members will make this choice to become healthy.

**Lessons Learned:** While OBSN has a spiritual relationship and formal economic relationships with tobacco in the past, the health of our tribe members is of critical importance. Smoking creates significant health disparities in Native country which causes cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes. Commercial tobacco use is often associated with other threats to health, such as physical inactivity and poor diet. Addressing commercial tobacco can only improve the health of many tribe members.

## Contact Information:

Contact: Vickie Jeffries, Tribal Administrator  
Agency: Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, Inc.  
Address: P.O. Box 356, Mebane, NC 27302 (mailing address)  
OBSN Tribal Center, 4902 Dailey Store Road - Burlington, NC 27217  
Phone: 336-421-1317  
Email: [obsntribe@gmail.com](mailto:obsntribe@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.obsn.org](http://www.obsn.org)

**To learn more about smoke-free and tobacco-free policies in N.C., visit**  
[www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov)



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
Division of Public Health

State of North Carolina • Roy Cooper, Governor  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Dr. Mandy K. Cohen, Secretary

N.C. Division of Public Health • Tobacco Prevention & Control Branch  
*The Department of Health and Human Services does not discriminate on the basis of race,  
Color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment on the provision of services*

## Quote

***“Sacred use,  
not abuse.”***