

WRITE A LETTER

Gathering a lot of people to write letters to a public official is a highly effective way of showing that politician how important the issue of tobacco control is. When her mailbox is stuffed with letters, you're bound to get noticed. Bright colored envelopes and neon paper help draw attention to your letters but have the downfall of looking less professional. Prewritten letters which people just sign are usually very effective tools to get lots of letters, but legislators often say that handwritten letters are much more compelling because they seem more genuine than form letters a person just signs.

First, find a policy issue that is important (e.g., fire-safe cigarettes, higher cigarette tax, smoke-free laws), identify a public official who can do something about it, and then get as many people as possible to send her a letter emphasizing the need for him to advocate this policy change. This advocacy event is not logistically difficult and very successful.

Here is how to do it:

A few days before the event:

- Find a policy issue that you want a elected official to support
- Research background information on this policy issue and find the mailing address of the public official.
- Create a document that contains quick facts that can be easily referenced when writing letters.
- Buy envelopes and stationery for the event.
- Create a model of a letter and underline important characteristics. For example, underline the parts that state the constituent residency, why this letter is being written, and point out the supporting facts throughout the letter.

Day of event:

- Get everyone together- food usually helps draw a crowd!
- Bring plenty of pens along with the stationery, envelopes, and fact sheets.
- Present the issue to the group in five to ten minutes, making sure to reference the fact sheet you created. Go through your model letter and emphasize the crucial underlined parts.
- Take lots of pictures.

Once activists have finished writing their letter, have them write their return address on the left upper left-hand side of the envelope, write the address of the public official in the center, and seal the envelope. At the end of the event gather up all the letters and mail them!

Don't Forget!:

Adapted from: <http://www.kickbuttsday.org/search-activities/>

- Email your event report to staff@txsaywhat.com for a chance to win scholarships to the 2014 Say What! Texas Tobacco-Free Conference!

In April 2007, twenty youth in Maine wrote letters thanking all four of the state's congressmen for cosponsoring legislation to grant the Food and Drug Administration the power to regulate tobacco products. It is important that we not only direct legislators to act responsibly on the issue of tobacco control, but that we also thank them when they follow through with our direction. You can also send letters via email. Depending on the ranking of your politician, some of them actually read their own mail. If not, than it is answered by a legislative aide who briefs your politician about what, and how many, emails they received. They can be generic, where people fill in the blanks of a pre-written email that you have written and sent them. Even better than generic emails are personalized, individual emails, since politicians then get multiple stories and reasons to support the same cause.