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**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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**Tuesday, March 15, 2005**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SWAT Takes Its Message to the Beach**

Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) will hold its annual **SWAT Sandblast Beach Olympics** Saturday, March 19, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Treasure Island Beach, 11260 Gulf Blvd.

SWAT is the youth-led organization that teaches other youth about the manipulation and marketing efforts of the tobacco industry. Developers of the original **truth** marketing campaign, SWAT has a proven track record. According to 1998-2002 results of the Florida Youth Tobacco Survey, middle school smoking rates have declined 50% and high school rates have declined 35%.

Despite this success, funding for SWAT and the tobacco control program has been reduced over the years. Current funding for the statewide program is \$1 million. Many expected the program to disappear, but local students are committed to fighting the battle.

“The tobacco industry hasn’t stopped lying and deceiving people, so we can’t stop exposing the truth. Without the money, we’ll just have to be more creative,” said Missy Finley, Chair of Pinellas County SWAT.

SWAT Sandblast is one of the ways SWAT gets its message out to teens. While participants enjoy volleyball, tug-of-war and other games, the leaders of SWAT expose them to tobacco facts and industry quotes. Free gear with the anti-Big Tobacco message is also given away—much in the same manner tobacco companies give free things to market their products.

Registration for teams and individuals begins at 10 a.m., with events starting at 10:45 a.m. The event is free to youth in middle school and high school, and is co-sponsored by the City of St. Petersburg’s TASCOTeens and Steps to a HealthierFlorida-Pinellas. For more information, call 727-824-6947.

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*The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.*