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## OPINIONS

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## Local firefighters union aims to smoke out tobacco use

Smoking is the No. 1 cause of premature death and a significant contributor to heart disease, lung disease and cancer. In an effort to



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change policy and become the first smoke-free union in the United States, the International Association of Fire Fighters along with local chapters, including the United Phoenix Fire Fighters Association, are encouraging members, their families and the

general community to take on healthier lifestyles by quitting smoking. It is also challenging other Arizona companies to become smoke-free, not only to reduce health-care costs but for the health benefits of employees.

In Arizona, a smoker pays about \$4,380 every year to smoke 1½ packs a day. Just think what an extra \$4,380 a year could do for most Arizonans who have a tighter rein on their wallet.



DAVID WALLACE/THE REPUBLIC

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From a broader perspective, Arizona pays about \$3.6 million each day in costs for smokers including time off work and health care for smoking-related illness — approximately \$150,000 per hour.

It is the mission of the United Phoenix Fire Fighters Association to protect and improve the quality of life in our communities through community part-

### MY TURN

nerships, community-service programs, and fire- and life-safety education. Representing more than 2,400 members in Phoenix, Glendale, Peoria, Tempe and Chandler, the UPFFA is committed to educating both our employees and members of the community about important health issues, including the dangers of tobacco use.

Our mission coincides with the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout on Thursday, which encourages smokers to quit tobacco for at least one day, in the hopes that it will lead to a lifetime of being smoke-free. Among current U.S. smokers, more than 70 percent say they want to quit but it takes an average of seven to eight quit attempts before they are able to make it stick.

And with the cost of cigarettes at an all-time high, there is no better time than now to learn about ways to stop smoking.

But quitting smoking can be tough, so the UPFFA encourages those who are ready to quit to speak to their health-care provider about finding a smoking-cessation method that's right for them. We also encourage Valley employers to make cessation medications and counseling programs available for their employees.

As we approach yet another holiday season, the UPFFA is dedicated to educating all of those close to us, as well as those we help on a daily basis, to do the right thing for themselves and their families by quitting smoking.

Through this employee and community outreach effort, the UPFFA will build awareness for available smoking-cessation benefits for our employees as well as smoking-cessation tools for the community.

*Pete Gorraiz is the president of United Phoenix Fire Fighters Association, Local 493 — International Association of Fire Fighters.*