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 **Durrants**

Demand smoking ban, urges health expert

By Nigel Gould
Health Correspondent

ONE of the world's leading public health experts has urged local people to vote for a smoke-free environment.

Former Belfast man Martin McKee is Professor of European Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

He backs the Southern Health Board campaign encouraging people to respond

to the Department of Health's consultation on smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces.

Responses must be in by March 26 — and Health Minister Angela Smith has vowed to make a decision quickly.

Prof McKee said: "One by one, countries are lining up to ban smoking in public places and Northern Ireland is the latest to review its legislation.

"Various organisations claim that the risks of second-hand smoke have been exaggerated but studies show the danger is far greater than had been suspected.

"The harmful effects are not limited to lung cancer; second-hand smoke is also a cause of heart disease and those exposed most to other people's smoke have a 60% increased risk of a heart attack."

Prof McKee added: "Smoking kills about 3,000 people in Northern Ireland every year — nearly as many has died in the entire Troubles. There are tens of thousands disabled by emphysema, heart disease and stroke, and many die because of exposure to other people's smoke.

"We now have an opportunity to make our voices heard by responding to the Government's consultation."

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