

## Merchants want preemptive strike on black-market smokes

MIKE KING  
THE GAZETTE

Fearing a resurgence of black-market tobacco activity, cigarette merchants have asked police and politicians to nip the problem in the bud.

The Association des Détaillants en Alimentation du Québec, which represents 10,000 food retailers, sent out a plea yesterday to both the Sûreté du Québec and party leaders in the provincial election to act on the matter.

"Indian traders have great latitude," association president Michel Gadbois told a news conference at the group's downtown headquarters.

Gadbois was referring specifically to the Mohawk community in Oka and Kanataake, where he said contraband smoke shops are popping up again.

There were at least 30 such stores operating before the federal and provincial governments slashed taxes on tobacco products in February. That move drove down the price of tobacco items so much that it virtually eliminated the black-market trade and closed reserve outlets.

But the business resumed in April with one shop in Oka and at least six others have since followed suit, association member Sylvain Beaulne said.

Beaulne, an organizer earlier this year of the Mouvement pour l'Abolition des Taxes Réservées aux Cigarettes, said the group is ready to get back into action.

Neither Beaulne nor Gadbois would say whether they plan to mobilize before the Sept. 12 election. But he said his members employ about 100,000 people "and that represents a lot of voters."

The association also filed a complaint with the

Sûreté on Tuesday concerning the smoke shop that reopened in Oka. Sûreté Constable Pierre Robichaud acknowledged receiving the two-page report electronically. "But we don't accept complaints by fax," he said.

Gadbois said the solution to the contraband problem is simple and already exists, but isn't being enforced.

"The law is clear: all retailers must pay the taxes (on tobacco sold), including those in Oka and Kanataake."

He suggested that if police are "too scared to go on the reserves," they should then set up road blocks outside Indian territory and search motorists for contraband tobacco products.

Alain Bouchard, president of Alimentation Couche-Tard, conceded that the renewed trade in contraband smokes is having only a marginal effect now.

"We're here today to forewarn."

THE GAZETTE, MONTREAL, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1994

502568421