

SMOKING IN MOVIES

The increase in tobacco use in movies poses a serious public health concern. Ideally, this problem would be solved through a cooperative effort between those involved in the movie industry and the public health community. We have believed and continue to hope that the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) would work with us and others concerned about this problem on solutions that address this issue in ways that are sensitive to the movie industry's needs. Some in the movie industry on their own have taken steps to curtail tobacco use in movies and they deserve public recognition and support. We applaud their efforts and encourage others to do so as well.

However, we have also concluded that more must be done now. We call on the movie industry to take significant steps on its own to reduce tobacco use in movies, especially in movies viewed by large numbers of young people. And, to further reduce tobacco's presence in movies, we call on the MPAA to adopt a policy of requiring an R-rating as part of its own voluntary code for new movies with smoking scenes. This proposal would exempt older movies, movies that clearly and unambiguously reflect the dangers of tobacco use and movies that accurately reflect the smoking behavior of an actual historical figure.

We also support other measures to work with and recognize those in the movie industry committed to addressing this problem. We remain open to working with Hollywood and the MPAA to find the most effective ways to limit kids' exposure to smoking in the movies.

Evidence shows that smoking in movies increases youth smoking

Our decision to support this policy rests in the extensive evidence showing that smoking in the movies impacts kids' decisions to start smoking. Smoking is far more prevalent in movies than in real life and is presented in a considerably more positive and glamorous way. The evidence clearly shows that children who are exposed to smoking in movies are more likely to try smoking themselves:

- In June 2003, researchers from Dartmouth Medical School published the strongest research to date showing that exposure to smoking in movies has a significant impact on kids' decision to start smoking. The study, published in *The Lancet*, showed that children ages 10-14 who watched the highest amount of smoking in movies were 2.71 times more likely to start smoking than those children who viewed the least amount.
- Since 1990, the incidence of smoking in movies has increased. An analysis of a random sample of five of the top grossing films in the United States each year found that smoking in movies increased during the 1990s and into 2000.ⁱ A 2001 study of the top 25 U.S. box office films for each year from 1988 to 1997 found that more than 85 percent of the films included tobacco use, with tobacco brands appearing in 28 percent.ⁱⁱ

- A 1999 survey of more than 4,900 school children aged nine to 15 in Vermont and New Hampshire found that those with the heaviest exposure to smoking through movies were two and a half times more likely to have tried smoking than those with the least exposure. Only 4.9 percent of kids who had seen zero to 50 incidence of smoking in the movies had tried smoking, compared to the 31.3 percent who had seen more than 150.ⁱⁱⁱ
- A 2002 study of more than 4,500 students in 5th through 8th grades found that kids whose parents let them watch R-rated movies (which have the highest levels of smoking) are more than 15 times more likely to have tried smoking than whose parents do not let them watch such movies (35 percent vs. 2 percent).^{iv}
- A 1996 survey of 6th to 12th graders in New England schools found that the more their favorite movie stars smoked in films the higher the kids ranked in a smoking index ranging from non-susceptible and susceptible nonsmokers to experimenters to current smokers. Those kids who had not yet smoked but favored high-smoking stars were more likely to have a favorable attitude toward smoking.^v

Will an R-rating reduce youth smoking?

In Hollywood today, movie producers covet the PG-13 rating. In fact, 13 of the top 20 films of 2002 received PG-13 ratings and earned \$2.45 billion at the box office.^{vi} With an R-rating, the size of a movie's potential audience is greatly reduced. The economic reality of a smaller audience will cause filmmakers to re-think their decision to include smoking in their films, therefore effectively reducing the number of kids exposed to smoking through the movies.^{vii} The R-rating system is a real solution to a deadly problem.

ⁱ Kacirk, K. & S. Glanz, "Smoking in Movies in 2000 Exceeded Rates in the 1960s," Letter, *Tobacco Control* 10: 397-98, 2001

ⁱⁱ Sargent, J., et al., "Brand Appearances in Contemporary Cinema Films and Contribution to Global Marketing of Cigarettes," *Lancet* 357(9249): 29-32, January 2001

ⁱⁱⁱ Sargent, J., et al., "Effect of Seeing Tobacco use in Films on Trying Smoking among Adolescents: Cross Sectional Study," *British Medical Journal* 323: 1-6, December 15, 2001

^{iv} Dalton, B. et al., "Relation between Parental Restrictions on Movies and Adolescent Use of Tobacco and Alcohol," *Effective Clinical Practice* 5(1) January/February 2002

^v Tickle, J., et al., "Favorite Movie Stars, Their Tobacco Use in Contemporary Movies, and Its Association with Adolescent Smoking," *Tobacco Control* 10: 16-22, 2001.

^{vi} Weinraub, Bernard, "This Story is Not Rated R. Everybody Please Read IT.," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2003

^{vii} "The Solution: Rate Smoking Movies "R"", SmokeFreeMovies.com, http://www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/solution/r_rating.html