

HOW THE MPAA'S TOBACCO-HAPPY RATINGS KEEP FAMILIES IN THE DARK

Health authorities worldwide back an adult (“R”) rating for future movies with smoking, with commonsense exceptions for portrayals of actual people who actually smoked and depictions of the real health consequences of tobacco use.

In May 2007, the MPAA claimed to make smoking a factor in ratings. But smoking and tobacco are mentioned nowhere in the MPAA’s official rating standards. And the MPAA has never named a single film whose rating was increased at all because of smoking, let alone rated “R.”

Instead, the MPAA has added small-print “smoking” labels to a small fraction of top-grossing films with smoking—just 26 of 172 youth-rated films with smoking in the last four and a half years. Youth-rated films with heavy smoking have been left unlabeled. So were youth-rated films that spotlighted tobacco brands like Marlboro and Camel Light.

77% of audience exposure to youth-rated smoking comes from movies without MPAA smoking labels.

The MPAA’s member companies have implemented what amounts to a “PR” rating that ignores most of the smoking in kid-rated films and keeps families in the dark.



Following a pattern: In 2011, most top-grossing PG films with tobacco got an MPAA “smoking” label (above). But the MPAA left labels off 97% of top-grossing PG-13 films with tobacco, even though PG-13 films deliver 10 times more tobacco exposure than PG films.

2011 PG-13 films with smoking — ignored by the MPAA

TITLE	COMPANY	TOBACCO INCIDENTS	TOBACCO IMPRESSIONS
Columbiana	Sony	30-49	151,000,000
Country Strong	Sony	10-29	39,000,000
Cowboys & Aliens	Comcast	10-29	206,000,000
Help, The	Disney	50+	2,460,000,000+
Larry Crowne	Comcast	50+	249,000,000
Limitless	Relativity	10-29	95,000,000
Mission: Impossible...Protocol	Viacom	10-29	431,000,000+
Moneyball	Sony	10-29	152,000,000
Sherlock Holmes...Shadows	Time Warner	50+	1,462,000,000+
Sucker Punch	Time Warner	10-29	79,000,000
Super 8	Viacom	10-29	212,000,000
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	Viacom	10-29	626,000,000
War Horse	Disney	10-29	180,000,000+
Water for Elephants	News Corp.	50+	930,000,000
X-Men: First Class	News Corp.	30-49	703,000,000
+ 14 MORE PG-13 FILMS WITH TOBACCO IMAGERY		1-9	396,000,000+

In 2011, only one of the 30 top-grossing PG-13 films with tobacco even carried an MPAA “smoking” label. If the MPAA rated future smoking “R,” producers would calibrate smoking just as they now routinely calibrate other content for a desired rating. The benefit to global public health might surpass all of Hollywood’s medical charities and social causes combined.

Pasting a few “smoking” labels on films may also lead parents to believe that movies *without* “smoking” labels are safely tobacco-free.

The fact is, since May 2007, *more than half* of all top-grossing PG-13 films have included tobacco imagery. Yet fewer than 10% of those films (13 of 149) carry even small-print “smoking” labels in their MPAA ratings.

Some major studios have shown it’s possible to cut tobacco incidents in kid-rated films by 90%.

That’s progress. But to create a permanent, structural incentive that will keep future kid-rated movies smoke-free across the industry, the MPAA needs to drop its “PR” ratings and adopt the real R-rating for tobacco.



SmokeFreeMovies.ucsf.edu