



ONTARIO COALITION FOR SMOKE-FREE MOVIES

Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division • Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario
Non-Smoker's Rights Association/Smoking and Health Action Foundation • Ontario Lung Association
Ontario Tobacco Control Area Networks • OPHA Children Marketing Work Workgroup
Ottawa Public Health Exposé • Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada • PTCC Media Network

www.smokefreemovies.ca

SMOKING IN THE MOVIES

The Problem

The history of the tobacco industry's collaboration with Hollywood, including payment for the placement of tobacco products in movies, is well documented. "Film is better than any commercial that has been run on television or in any magazine, because the audience is totally unaware of any sponsor involvement."¹ Today, tobacco use in films remains widespread.² The influence of smoking in movies on young people should not be surprising, given the pervasive influence of Hollywood on popular culture and the fact that most other vehicles of tobacco promotion have been banned.

In 1998 US tobacco companies entered into a legally-binding agreement with state attorneys general that prohibits paid brand placement in entertainment accessible to young people. Despite this prohibition, smoking in movies actually increased from 1998 to 2005, especially in blockbuster films.³ Tobacco imagery and brands are still depicted in more than half of all films rated PG-13 in the US and 14A in Canada⁵. As well, it is still very common for leading actors and actresses to smoke on-screen, giving rise to speculation about whether payments to moviemakers are still being made, however covertly.

Impact on Youth Smoking

Research examining the prevalence of smoking in movies and its impact on youth smoking has accumulated in recent years. The US National Cancer Institute reviewed this evidence in 2008 and reached the following conclusion: "The total weight of evidence from cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies indicates a causal relationship

between exposure to smoking in movies and youth smoking initiation."⁴

Analyzing the results of four large US studies, researchers estimate that 44% of youth smoking can be attributed to on-screen smoking exposure.⁶ Applied to a Canadian content, an estimated 130,000 Canadians age 15-19 became addicted to tobacco industry products due to exposure to on-screen smoking, of whom 43,000 will eventually die of tobacco-caused diseases.⁵

Film ratings directly affect the amount of exposure to tobacco in films that young people receive. In Canada, the majority of films released in 2009 were youth-rated, and **1.117 billion tobacco impressions** were delivered in G/PG/14A films in theatres.⁵ The number of tobacco impressions is calculated by multiplying the number of tobacco incidents per film by the number of paid admissions per film.⁵ It is important to note that while reports of in-theatre tobacco depictions represent an index of exposure, they **underestimate the total tobacco impressions** delivered, since films are also viewed on DVD and Blue-ray, video-on-demand, cable, satellite, and broadcast and broadband media.⁵

Although most movies viewed in Canada are produced by US companies, the number of youth-rated films with tobacco depictions shown in theatres is higher in Canada than the US because provincial film boards classify more movies as 14A or PG that are rated R in the US.⁵ In 2009, 125 of the 145 movies with tobacco released in Canadian theatres were youth-rated films (G, PG, 14A), delivering more than two-thirds (68%) of all in-theatre tobacco impressions.⁵

Solutions

The World Health Organization endorses four solutions to reduce tobacco depiction in movies:⁷

Rate new movies an adult rating: Film ratings can help solve the problem of youth exposure. Since 90% of tobacco impressions delivered to theatre audiences in Canada in 2009 were delivered by large US media conglomerates, provincial film boards can restrict youth access to images of tobacco in movies by assigning an 18A rating.⁵ Any film that shows or implies tobacco use or tobacco products should be rated 18A. The only exceptions should be when the presentation of tobacco clearly and unambiguously reflects the dangers and consequences of tobacco use or is necessary to represent the smoking of a real historical figure.

In Ontario, the Ontario Film Review Board (OFRB) operates as an arms-length agency reporting to the Minister of Consumer Services.⁸ The OFRB classifies film to provide the public with sufficient information to make informed viewing choices for themselves and their children. The OFRB's film classifications are: G (General or suitable for all); PG (Parental Guidance); 14A (persons younger than 14 must be accompanied by an adult); 18A (persons younger than 18 must be accompanied by an adult); and R (restricted to persons over 18). The OFRB does not currently rate movies with tobacco 18A.

Certify no payoffs: Require film producers to certify in the closing credits that no person involved in the production received anything of value (money, free cigarettes or other gifts, free publicity, interest-free loans or anything else) from anyone in exchange for displaying tobacco in the film.

Require strong anti-smoking ads prior to movies depicting tobacco use: Require studios and theatres to run a proven-effective anti-tobacco advertisement (not produced by a tobacco company) before any film with any tobacco presence, in any distribution channel, regardless of the rating in any Canadian province/territory at the expense of the distributor.

Stop identifying tobacco brands: There should be no tobacco brand identification in any movie scene or the presence of tobacco brand imagery (such as billboards) in the background of any scene.

Get Involved

1. Endorse actions to reduce smoking in movies. Organizations that have endorsed the policies to reduce youth exposure to on-screen smoking are listed at: www.smokefreemovies.ca/content/letters-support-0>
2. Write to the Ontario Minister of Consumer Services and the members of the OFRB to urge them to have the OFRB institute the policy solutions.
3. Request municipalities with public library video collections to clearly label their movies to warn of the risks to children and youth from viewing tobacco imagery. The tobacco content of films from 2002 to the present is available at www.facebook.com/hookedbyhollywood.
4. Write letters to Canadian theatre executives about the impact smoking in the movies is having on Canadian youth. Urge them to work with the Canadian tobacco control community to counter tobacco images in movies by placing proven-effective, strong anti-tobacco messages (at distributors' and exhibitors' expense) before movies that depict tobacco images.
5. Write letters to federal and provincial ministries that administer film subsidies requesting that films with tobacco images assigned a G, PG, or 14A rating be ineligible for public subsidies.

References:

- (1) Smoke-Free Movies website. Accessed April 23, 2010. <http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/problem/bigtobacco.html>.
- (2) Smoke-Free Movies website. http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/problem/studio_surveys.html. Accessed April 23, 2010.
- (3) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. (August 20 2010) Smoking in Tobacco-Grossing Movies- United States, 1991-2009. www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5932a2.htm?s_cid=mm5932a2_w. Accessed August 2010.
- (4) National Cancer Institute, *Monograph 19: The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, June 2008.
- (5) Physicians for Smoke-Free Canada, Polansky, J.. Tobacco Vector: How American movies, Canadian film subsidies and provincial rating practices will kill 43,000 Canadian teen alive today- and what Canadian governments can do about it. July 2010. www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/2010/Tobaccovector.pdf.
- (6) C Millett and SA Glantz, "Assigning an '18' rating to movies with tobacco imagery is essential to reduce youth smoking (editorial)," *Thorax* 2010; 65(5): 377-78.
- (7) World Health Organization, Smoke-free movies: From evidence to action, 2009. www.who.int/tobacco/smoke_free_movies/en/. Accessed April 2010.
- (8) Ontario Film Review Board website. Accessed August 17 2010. www.ofrb.gov.on.ca/english/page3.htm.