Despite the dangers of tobacco use, Hollywood still glamorizes smoking in films and television shows marketed to children and teenagers!

On average, children and teens overestimate the rate of adult smoking by three-times the actual number!

Why?

Sadly, one of the reasons is that the smoking in movies has increased since 1990, such that modern movies contain as much onscreen smoking as films from the 1950's.

Currently, 60% of lead actors can be seen smoking in movies. Is it any wonder that children believe that two-thirds of real adults smoke? Or that half of all teenagers light their first cigarette because it looked cool in a movie?

You Can Make a Difference!

There are many ways that you can show the tobacco industry that you are tired of them preying on our children. For example:

- Discuss deceitful marketing tactics with your children, including the glamorization of smoking by actors in movies

- Support efforts to place tobacco warnings on films, television shows, and DVDs that are marketed to children.

- Support efforts to run anti-tobacco Public Service Announcement before films containing scenes of tobacco use.

- Write your state and national legislators to support further restrictions on tobacco advertising and further expansion of smoking restrictions in public.

For additional information, contact the Quit Doc Research and Education Foundation (866-355-QUIT, www.qdref.org) , or the Health Access and Tobacco Division of the Florida Department of Health (850-245-4144)

Quit Doc
Research and Education Foundation

5944 Coral Ridge Dr., #255, Coral Springs, FL 33076
Phone: 866-355-QUIT (866-355-7848)
Fax: 877.576.1434
www.qdref.org

SmokeScreeners™
A Tobacco Awareness Program
Seen One? Take One!
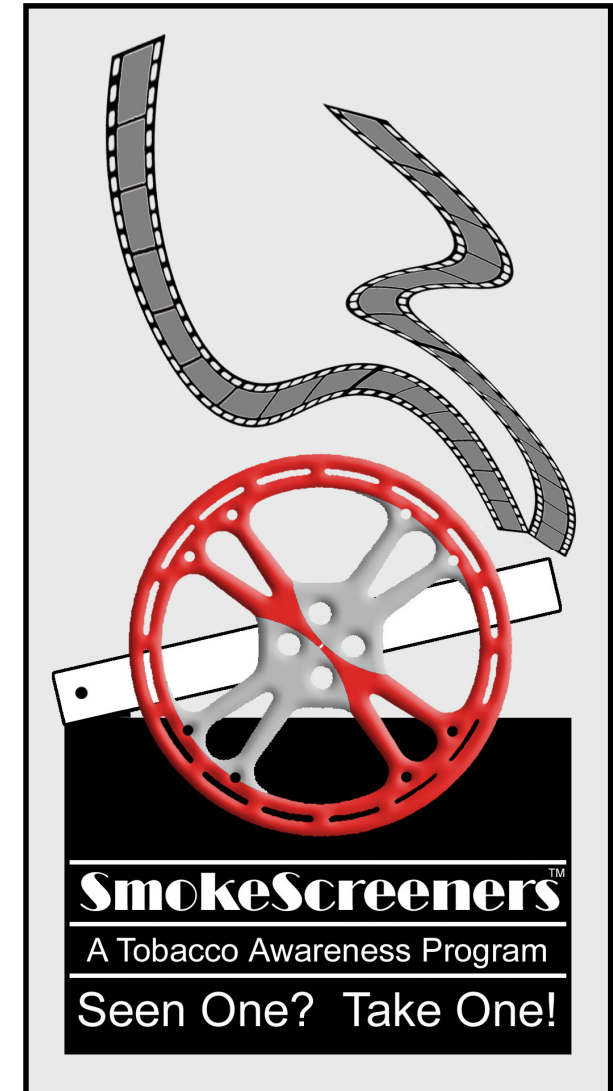
An Educational Program to Help Clear the Air on the Impact of Smoking by Actors in Movies and Television Shows.

Quit Doc
Research and Education Foundation

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Issue

Since the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement established limitations on tobacco advertising targeting children, there has been an alarming increase in the amount of smoking in G Rated, PG Rated, and PG-13 Rated films. A thorough review of the literature published in the journal Pediatrics in 2005 noted the following disturbing trends:

- From 1950 to 1990, the appearance of smoking in movies decreased; starting in 1990, there was a rapid increase, such that by 2002 smoking in the movies was as common as it had been in 1950!

- Beginning in 2002, the total amount of smoking depicted in movies was greater in youth-rated (G/PG/PG-13) movies than in adult R-Rated films, increasing adolescent exposure to movie smoking. Most of this occurred because the MPAA began to "down-rate" the movies by the mid-1990s, issuing PG-13 ratings to films that would have been given R ratings in the past

- Between 1950 and 2000, the prevalence of adult smoking in the United States fell from 44% to 22%; yet lead actors smoked in 60% of popular films during 2002-2003. In other words, smoking is much more common in the fictional world of films than it has ever been in the real world.

- Smoking by female leads nearly tripled from 11% in the 1960s to 30% by 1997.

- There was at least one smoking character depicted in all seven animated films released during 1996-1997.

- In the fictional world of the movies, smoking is rarely depicted as a chronic, relapsing addiction that causes preventable disease and death.

- And here's the kicker: in a survey of adolescents who smoke, 52% cite the depiction of tobacco use in the movies as the primary reason that they tried their first cigarette!

The Solutions

MPAA Ratings System

The simplest way to warn parents about movies that include on-screen smoking is to update the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Ratings System. Under this proposal, the MPAA would give a mandatory R-rating to any movie that includes smoking, with a few notable exceptions (historical context, accurate portrayal of negative consequences of smoking). In this way, tobacco use (which causes 440,000 deaths each year) would be given the same weight as gun violence (which causes 30,000 deaths each year), and nudity and foul language (which cause NO deaths).

In 2007, under mounting pressure from health advocacy groups and the States' Attorney Generals, the MPAA begrudgingly decided to "consider" smoking as they rate movies. Unfortunately, there will be no objective criteria applied by the MPAA as they "consider" onscreen smoking.

Why would the MPAA resist such a simple solution? The answer, as always, is money. Teenagers purchase the vast majority of movie tickets, and R-ratings would have a clear impact on ticket sales. The real reason that the MPAA is resisting the mandatory R-rating is that they would have to decide which is worth more to the movie industry: the money they receive from tobacco pay-offs, or the money they receive from ticket sales.

Independent Ratings Systems

Since there seems to be so much resistance to using the existing structure of the MPAA Ratings System to provide information about on-screen smoking, and since most parents do not have the time to preview movies themselves, several groups have started independent ratings systems for interested parents.

The goal of such programs is not to censor movies. On the contrary, this information is provided to better inform parents about the content of movies. This allows the parents and children to look at movies with a more critical eye, discuss the issue of tobacco, and help them make better entertainment choices.

Hold the Motion Picture Industry Accountable

The increase in smoking in movies since 1990 seems strange given the decline in adult smoking over the same period of time. The Motion Picture Industry should make it clear that this is not occurring because of pay-off by the tobacco industry.

- *Certify no pay-offs:* The producers should include language in the closing credits declaring that nobody on the production received anything of value *from anyone* in exchange for using or displaying tobacco. This would include cash money, free cigarettes or other gifts, free publicity, or interest-free loans.

- *Require strong anti-smoking ads:* Studies in recent years have looked at the effects of viewing anti-smoking ads before a movie that includes on-screen smoking. Researchers found that teenagers who saw the anti-smoking ads had significantly more negative thoughts about lead characters who smoked. Studios and theaters should be required to include independently-produced, strong anti-smoking ads before any film with any tobacco presence, in any distribution channel, regardless of its MPAA rating.

- *Stop identifying tobacco brands:* Specific cigarette brands are still identifiable in current movies. Producers should immediately stop the practice of tobacco brand identification in the background of any movie scene, including tobacco products and tobacco signs. It is, after all, exactly what the tobacco industry promised to do in the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement... and we should hold them to their word.

About SmokeScreeners

With this in mind, The *Quit Doc Research and Education Foundation* has created SmokeScreeners. The SmokeScreeners program has two goals.

Our first goal is to provide families with information about the films your children are seeing every day in theaters, on television, and, most importantly, on videos and DVDs. Using a simple scoring system that looks at the amount of onscreen smoking, the location of the smoking, and the importance of the cast-member seen smoking, we give each film a rating from 0 to 4 "butts". The more smoking that appears in the movie, the more "butts" the movie receives. It is that simple. All of these film reviews can be found on our web site at *www.smokescreeners.org*.

Our second goal may be more important. We want families, especially children, to review the movies that they watch. By focusing on the issue, and watching for scenes of smoking that we usually take for granted, families will no longer fall for the manipulative, subliminal messages delivered by actors smoking onscreen. Our program encourages children to review films and submit their reviews to us to add to our growing database. Even if families review previously submitted films, they learn something from the process. If you are interested in contributing, review sheets and instructions can be downloaded from the SmokeScreeners web site.

In time, we hope to be able to screen movies before they even open in the theaters. For now, however, we will do the best we can to get the word out to parents who are interested in this issue. With your help, we can show the critics that we are taking "personal responsibility" as we press Hollywood and Big Tobacco to take a little "corporate responsibility".