

Myth vs. Reality: Smoking in Youth-Rated Movies

Tobacco is the number one cause of preventable death in the United States and the number two cause of death worldwide. The on-screen usage of tobacco in Hollywood films poses one of the greatest threats to the long term health of children 10 and older. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has named tobacco imagery in movies as a major factor in adolescent smoking initiation.

Screen Out! is a three year public awareness campaign with the ultimate goal of getting tobacco out of youth-rated films. The campaign seeks to gain national support through petitions, endorsements and letter writing. Getting tobacco out of youth-rated films is necessary for safeguarding the health of our nation's children. Here are some common myths used to discredit the urgency in getting smoking out of youth-rated films.

MYTH: Adolescents are not influenced by on-screen smoking.

REALITY: Approximately 1.4 million youth under the age of 18 start smoking each year. Evidence shows that movies featuring tobacco imagery influence more than one-third of all new youth smokers to start. When youth are exposed to smoking in movies they are 90% more likely to initiate smoking. The use of tobacco imagery in movies has an easy preventable solution: Rate all new movies that show or imply tobacco use "R".

MYTH: Restricting tobacco use in movies, especially movies portraying historic events, will affect the quality of the movie.

REALITY: The four solutions proposed by Screen Out! do not restrict tobacco imagery in "R" rated movies. If movie studios want to feature smoking in a particular film, then that film should be rated "R". The only exceptions are 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.

MYTH: Requiring the MPAA to rate movies featuring smoking "R" is censorship.

REALITY: We are not asking movie studios to take smoking out of their film, that would be censorship. What we ARE asking is that the MPAA create a level playing field by combating the influence on-screen tobacco promotion has on adolescents in an effective manner. Because smoking can be featured in any movie that is not youth-rated, censorship is not an issue.

MYTH: Product placement of tobacco brands and on-screen smoking has decreased since the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement in 1998.

REALITY: On-screen tobacco use has actually increased by 50% since the Settlement Agreement. Tobacco use in films pre-settlement featured tobacco an average of 0.89 minutes compared to a post-settlement average of 1.35 minutes.

MYTH: Movie studios are not going to listen to the public—if they want to show smoking in their movies, they will.

REALITY: The AMA Alliance has a long history of advocating for the health of America's children. Advocating for tobacco free youth-rated films is just another step in this long standing tradition. Through letter writing, petition and endorsement campaigns, members of the AMA Alliance are creating national public awareness and building a strong base of support for the four solutions of the Smoke Free Movies campaign. With your help, we can pressure movie studios and the MPAA to change their ways and get smoking out of youth-rated movies.

For more information please visit our website at:

www.screenout.org



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