

TOBACCO AT THE MOVIES

Tobacco Use in PG-13 Films

By Crystal Ng and Bradley Dakake

Survey conducted by Crystal Ng, Bradley Dakake, and Deirdre Cummings of MASSPIRG on behalf of the State Public Interest Research Groups' consumer program. Special thanks to Graham Kelder, Chair, Policy Committee, Massachusetts Coalition for a Healthy Future; Tony Dutzik, State PIRGs' Policy Analyst; Ed Mierzwinski, the State PIRGs' National Consumer Program Director; and Alison Cassidy, the State PIRGs' Research Director.

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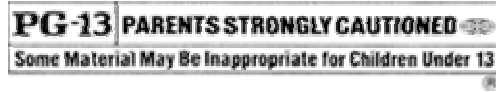
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SUMMARY

Contrary to the expected decrease of tobacco use in films following the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) between the tobacco industry and 46 states¹, *tobacco use in the most popular youth-oriented movies has actually increased by 50 percent.*

The MSA holds tobacco companies accountable for their actions. They must pay restitution to 46 states for healthcare costs incurred from tobacco-caused illnesses. Additionally, tobacco companies must cease marketing practices that target minors and cannot make payments to Hollywood to get brand name tobacco products placed in movies.² Despite this agreement, tobacco products and their use have increasingly found their way into movies geared toward and accessible to teenagers. This report compares the incidence of tobacco use and brand appearance in PG-13 movies in the two years before (1996, 1997) and after (1999, 2000) the settlement.

The report found:

1. Smoking in the most popular, youth-oriented, PG-13 movies is up since the tobacco settlement.
2. Teenagers are more readily influenced by tobacco ads and/or use in films than other age groups.
3. Tobacco companies stand to benefit financially from individuals who start to use tobacco at an early age; 90 percent of all adult smokers begin before they are 18.
4. Tobacco companies have violated the tobacco settlement in other ways and have a long history of marketing their products toward young and underage persons. In

¹ <http://www.naag.org/tobac/tobagr.htm>. Accessed August 8, 2002.

² G. Kelder, "Consent Decrees and Judgments: in G. Kelger and P. Davidson, eds. The Multistate Master Settlement Agreement and the Future of State and Local Tobacco Control: An Analysis of Selected Topics and Provisions of the Multistate Master Settlement Agreement of November 23, 1998. (Commissioned and Funded by the American Cancer Society) (March 23, 1999).

June, 2002, RJ Reynolds was fined for continuing to advertise in magazines with high youth readership.

Specifically:

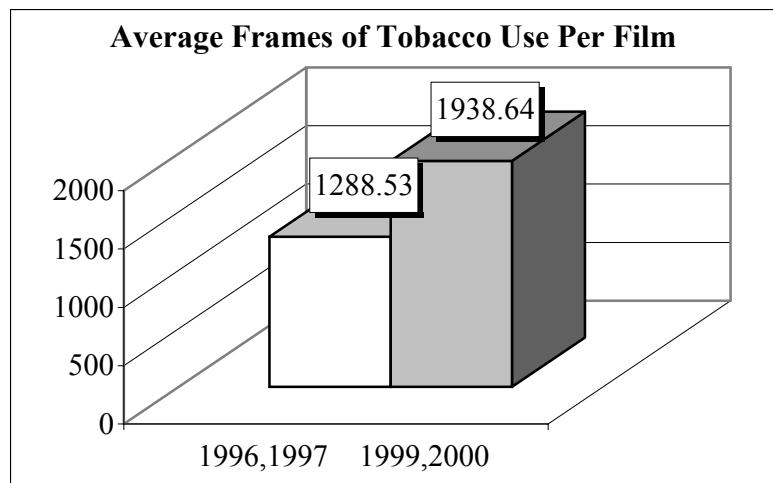
- **Tobacco use is up 50 percent** in post-settlement films. Of the films showing tobacco use, they averaged 1,288 frames of tobacco use before the settlement and 1,938 frames after the settlement. This translates into an average of 0.89 minutes of tobacco use in pre-settlement films versus 1.35 minutes post-settlement.³

- **Tobacco use remains prevalent in PG-13, youth-oriented movies.** Eighty-two percent (18 of 22) of post-settlement movies and 80 percent (16 of 20) of pre-settlement movies contained tobacco use.

- **Most films portray smokers and smoking in a positive or neutral light.** Eighty-three percent (15 of 18) of post-settlement movies with tobacco use showed characters with

either positive or neutral attitudes toward smoking, conveying the perception that smoking is acceptable and even “cool.” Some movies, like *The Family Man*, showed smoking in a festive atmosphere during a Christmas party, while others, like *What Women Want*, showed smoking as relaxing and calming. In *Notting Hill*, a supporting character with a positive connotation announces that she has given up smoking, her “favorite thing,” but in the end lights up again anyway.

- **Fewer films feature negative statements about tobacco use.** Before the settlement, 31 percent (5 of 16) of movies showed tobacco use as a negative; post-settlement that number fell to 17 percent (3 of 18). However, even negative



³ 24 frames are projected per second. <http://www.howstuffworks.com> and <http://www.24framespersecond.com>. Accessed July 22, 2002.

portrayals of smoking in film have been shown to increase propensity for youth smoking.⁴

- **Several films showed identifiable, brand name cigarette packs.** Although the name of the cigarette brand was obscured, the packaging design clearly identified the cigarettes as a particular brand. These movies were *The Perfect Storm*, *Meet the Parents*, and *The Family Man*. According to the MSA, brand-name tobacco use in films is forbidden.
- **Big name stars smoked in both pre- and post-settlement films.** Post-settlement on-screen smokers included Mel Gibson, Nicolas Cage, Ben Stiller, Drew Barrymore, Mark Wahlberg, Eddie Murphy, Hugh Jackman, Will Smith, Kevin Kline, and Kenneth Branagh. Pre-settlement on-screen smokers included Julia Roberts, Will Smith, Jeff Goldblum, Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet, Tommy Lee Jones, and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Studies have shown that young people are influenced by the smoking behavior of their favorite stars, both on and off the screen. As a result, the tobacco industry once regularly paid movie studios to display their brands in feature films prior to the settlement, a practice now forbidden. However, the continued – and increased – prevalence of tobacco use in youth-oriented movies following the settlement raises questions about the ability of tobacco companies to circumvent the MSA terms that curtailed the display of tobacco use in feature films.

“In contrast to the health groups, who saw smoking as a medical issue, the tobacco industry has always seen smoking as a cultural issue. And there is not a better way to control pop culture worldwide than through movies. Tobacco mass marketing and Hollywood pop culture grew up together, businesslike twins joined at the hip. For 80 years the tobacco industry has addicted hundreds of millions of men and women with the help of Hollywood movies – and later, TV – that portrayed smoking as glamorous, sexy, adult.”
–Professor Stanton Glantz, Los Angeles Times column, 2 June 2001.

⁴ http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/news/text_glantzLATimesOpEd.html, Accessed October 1, 2002.

To counter the detrimental effect on youth, Hollywood must restrict tobacco use in films. States also must enforce the terms of the settlement and fund tobacco control and prevention efforts that present young people with the true facts about smoking and health.

This report builds on the work of Professor Stanton Glantz of the School of Medicine, University of California at San Francisco, particularly his report “How the Tobacco Industry Built Its Relationship with Hollywood.”⁵ In that report, Glantz examines tobacco industry files to unearth the planned and methodical placement of tobacco products in film and television to increase product sales.

This report differs from Glantz’s because it looks only at movies that target minors and compares the amount of tobacco use in pre- and post-settlement PG-13 films.

Significantly, although the reports use different methodologies to quantify smoking in movies, they come to the same conclusion: Hollywood and the tobacco industry continue to addict children to smoking.

⁵ <http://www.saclung.org/tobacco%20control%20article.pdf>. Accessed September 24, 2002.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Tobacco kills 400,000 Americans every year, more than the death rates of alcohol, AIDS, car accidents, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined.⁶ Every year, 750,000 youths take up daily smoking, which will kill nearly 33 percent of them.⁷ Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer and is also a factor in respiratory and heart diseases.⁸

According to recent studies by the Department of Health and Human Services⁹ and the Centers for Disease Control¹⁰, the national smoking rate among youth is declining. Yet this encouraging fact contrasts with the rising use of tobacco in movies.

Tobacco and the movies have a long history. For years, the tobacco industry paid to place tobacco products, both brands and non-branded, in films. For example, Philip Morris paid

“We must continue to exploit new opportunities to get cigarettes on screen and into the hands of smokers.”

—A 1983 draft speech delivered by Hamish Maxwell, the president of Philip Morris International

\$350,000 to feature Lark cigarettes in the James Bond movie, *License to Kill*.¹¹ Brown and Williamson paid Sylvester Stallone \$500,000 to feature its cigarettes in one of his movies.¹² Philip Morris paid \$42,500 to have its Marlboro brand appear in *Superman II*, which was popular among teenagers.¹³

In the post-settlement film, *Charlie's Angels*, Drew Barrymore's lead character, three minor characters, and several background characters smoked. Barrymore's character, one of the heroines of the movie, is shown smoking in a school bathroom during a flashback scene. While the character's age is unclear, it is reasonable to assume she is not yet 18. Other smoking characters are having fun and enjoying themselves while smoking, adding to the positive and encouraging depiction of smoking. Directed by a successful music

⁶ <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org>. Accessed August 7, 2002.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Monitoring the Future*, 2001.

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Trends in Cigarette Smoking Among American High School Students—United States, 1991-2001*, 2002.

¹¹ <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu>. Accessed June 5, 2002.

¹² <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu>. Accessed June 5, 2002.

¹³ *Ibid.*

video director, someone who knows how to appeal to teenagers, the film was heavily marketed towards teenagers. As the ninth-highest grossing PG-13 film of 2000, *Charlie's Angels* serves as just one example of a subtler and more pervasive form of marketing than settlement-banned tobacco brand name merchandise and concert sponsorships.

Health advocates decry this practice because it caters to impressionable teenagers, who are encouraged to start smoking because of its positive portrayal on the screen. A study of films from 1960 to 1990 revealed that smoking in films was three times more prevalent in movies than it was in the general population, leading young people to conclude that “everyone smokes.”¹⁴

By watching movies that portray smoking as an acceptable, normal, and natural behavior, teenagers are more likely to light up. James Sargent of Dartmouth Medical School found that teenagers who watch movies that include tobacco use are more likely to have positive attitudes towards smoking.¹⁵ Two additional studies^{16,17} found that stars who smoke both on- and off-screen may encourage youth to smoke. The results found that teenagers whose favorite stars use tobacco in their movies are significantly more likely to have greater smoking experience and more favorable attitudes toward smoking than teenagers whose favorite stars do not use tobacco on-screen. Showing both movie stars and background actors smoking in PG-13 movies sends a message that smoking is normal, fun, and even desirable.

The fact that teenagers can draw these conclusions from film is particularly important because teenagers make up over a quarter (26 percent) of the movie-going population.¹⁸ Additionally, 63 percent of 9- to 17-year olds rent videos at least once per week.¹⁹ Because so many teenagers are viewing so many movies, those films serve as critical vehicles for companies – tobacco or otherwise – to reach a majority of teenagers. This is

¹⁴ William Bailey, *The Invisible Drug* (Mosaic Publications, 1996), p. 39.

¹⁵ James D. Sargent, “Viewing Tobacco Use in Movies”, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 22: 3. 2002.

¹⁶ Janet M. Distefan, et al, “Do Movie Stars Encourage Adolescents to Start Smoking?”, *Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 28. 1999.

¹⁷ Jennifer J. Tickle, et al, “Favorite Movie Stars, their Tobacco Use in Contemporary Movies, and its Association with Adolescent Smoking”, *Tobacco Control*, Vol. 10. 2001.

¹⁸ Office of National Drug Control Policy and Department of Health and Human Services, *Substance Use in Popular Movies and Music*, 1999.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

especially true of PG-13 movies, which are the most appropriate and accessible movies for teenagers.

Tobacco use in film is potentially far more persuasive than magazine advertisements. Each magazine advertisement constitutes only one image, which is usually clearly identifiable as a paid advertisement. On-screen tobacco use, on the other hand, does not appear to be a paid advertisement even if it truly is one; it seems to be real life. While tobacco companies can no longer rely on directly displaying their brands to teenagers in films, the amplified depiction of tobacco use in movies can have a similar, detrimental effect.

“Film is better than any commercial that has been run on television or any magazine, because the audience is totally unaware of any sponsor involvement.”
—Robert Richards, president of Productions, Inc., in a 1972 letter to the president of RJ Reynolds

The fact that 90 percent of all smokers start before they are 18²⁰ presents a considerable incentive for the tobacco industry. Often, tobacco companies gain customers for life when they successfully persuade teenagers to light up. Teenagers, therefore, are a critical audience for tobacco industry marketing campaigns.

The appeal to evade the terms of the settlement governing youth-oriented advertising has sometimes been too tempting for tobacco companies. On June 6, 2002, a California judge fined RJ Reynolds for continuing to advertise in magazines with high youth readership.²¹ Similarly, a study by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health found that cigarette advertising expenditures in magazines with high youth readership increased dramatically after the settlement.²² Some tobacco companies have even created their own “anti-tobacco” ad campaigns targeting minors. Philip Morris ran a “Think. Don’t Smoke” TV ad campaign until March 2002, when it was pulled under pressure from anti-tobacco groups. According to a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in June 2002, Philip Morris’ ads decreased anti-tobacco attitudes among 12- to 17-year olds, thus

²⁰ Illinois Department of Public Health *Health Beat*. www.idph.state.il.us/public/hb/hbsmoke.htm. Accessed August 5, 2002.

²¹ http://cbc.ca/stories/2002/06/05/Consumers/chewingtobacco_020605, “Chewing Tobacco Ads Aimed at Teens.” Accessed August 7, 2002.

²² Diane Turner-Bowker and William Hamilton, Cigarette Advertising Expenditures Before and After the Master Settlement Agreement: Preliminary Findings, May 15, 2000.

increasing the likelihood that they would begin smoking.²³ Lorillard ran its own "Tobacco is whacko if you're a teen" ad campaign. Matthew Myers, President of the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, said of Lorillard's ad, "They offer no reason not to smoke and portray smoking as an adult activity, thereby making it even more tempting to kids."²⁴ Myers concluded the ads "set the standard for ineffectiveness."²⁵

The fact that teenagers watch a lot of movies, that they are highly susceptible to messages contained in film, that film is a very good medium for influencing its audience, and that smokers typically start smoking before they turn 18 paints an appealing picture for tobacco companies.

In addition to crackdowns on violations of the MSA, other anti-tobacco initiatives throughout the nation have contributed to the effort to reduce

youth smoking. Tobacco tax increases – most notably in California, Massachusetts, and New York – have made cigarettes more expensive and therefore less appealing to teenagers. State Departments of Health and other anti-tobacco advocates have organized more effective tobacco education initiatives through tobacco control programs and counter-advertising, such as the Legacy Foundation's "Truth" campaign.

Disturbingly, recent budget shortfalls have led states to significantly cut anti-tobacco programs, once again undermining the ability of successful programs to function or exist and putting youth at risk. In FY 2003, anti-tobacco programs saw their budgets cut by 13.3 percent, or \$102.3 million. Worse, even states like Arizona, California, and Massachusetts, where anti-tobacco efforts have been very successful, saw their anti-tobacco programs cut by 50, 45, and 88 percent, respectively. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have sold ("securitized") all or part of their future tobacco settlement payments. Those states will receive a smaller, one-time, up-front payment that is less than the aggregate of annual payments they would receive over time. This is literally giving money away that should be used for anti-tobacco programs.²⁶

²³ Patricia Wen. "Antismoke Groups Hit Tobacco Firms' Antismoke Efforts," Boston Globe. September 16, 2002.

²⁴ Matthew L. Myers, President, Campaign For Tobacco-Free Kids, statement on Sept. 17, 2002.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ <http://tobaccofreekids.org/Script/DisplayPressRelease.php3?Display=523>, Accessed September 12, 2002.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To stop the influence of tobacco in movies on our children, more is needed from the states' attorneys general, individual states, and Hollywood. We recommend:

- **States' attorneys general should enforce all restrictions placed on the tobacco industry** in the 1998 settlement, especially bans on marketing toward children.
- **States should use settlement moneys to fully fund tobacco control efforts**, such as counter-advertising, youth education, and assistance for those who want to quit smoking. States should not divert tobacco settlement money away from healthcare or tobacco control, nor should they securitize settlement payments.
- **Film companies should restrict the use of tobacco in their movies**, especially those that are targeted toward and easily accessible to teenagers, the demographic most vulnerable to the tobacco industry's promotional messages. All films that show tobacco use should receive an automatic "R" rating.
- **Congress should investigate links between tobacco companies and Hollywood**, specifically to determine if tobacco companies are still either directly or indirectly funding Hollywood to use tobacco products in film, despite the terms of the settlement.

Already we have seen some, but not enough, progress made along these recommendations. Despite downturns in the economy, several states, including Maine, Maryland, Arkansas, and Minnesota, have increased their funding for anti-tobacco programs. Maine, Minnesota, and Mississippi actually exceed the Centers for Disease Control's spending recommendation for tobacco control initiatives.²⁷ Charlton Heston and Rob Reiner serve as good examples of Hollywood figures who have fought the tobacco industry's practices, leading a successful initiative to increase the tobacco tax in California. After Reiner saw Meg Ryan chain-smoking throughout one of his Castle Rock Entertainment films, "Proof of Life," he instituted a policy that if any director, producer, or actor wants to show smoking in a Castle Rock production, Reiner must personally approve it.²⁸

²⁷ <http://tobaccofreekids.org/reports/settlements/2002mid/historychart.pdf>. Accessed September 13, 2002.

²⁸ Sean P. Means, "A Campaign to Get Cigarettes Out of Movies Blows Smoke in the Wrong Direction," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 24, 2002. Note: "Proof of Life" was rated R (for reasons other than its excessive smoking scenes).

METHODOLOGY

The top 10 grossing films in America rated PG-13²⁹ from 1996, 1997, 1999, and 2000 were viewed. In addition, the top 5 video rentals in America rated PG-13³⁰ from 1996, 1997, 1999, and 2000 were viewed. In 2000, two movies that were not in the list of top 10 box-office movies appeared in the top 5 video rentals, bringing the total sample to 42 movies. Movies released in 1998 were not viewed because they were made either in 1998 or earlier, making before/after comparisons with the 1998 tobacco settlement more difficult.

For each film, the following measures were noted:

1. Title of movie
2. Genre
3. Year of release
4. Rating
5. Length of movie, in minutes
6. Length of tobacco use, in minutes
7. Length of tobacco appearance, in minutes
8. Length of brand appearance, in minutes
9. Type of tobacco
10. Name of brand
11. Context of brand appearance
12. Minors smoking
13. Notes

Measures 5 through 8 were recorded by a viewer with a stopwatch. “Tobacco use,” defined as the use or consumption of a tobacco product, included cigarettes, cigars, smokeless/chewing tobacco, and pipes. Average length of tobacco use and brand appearance was found by dividing the total of these measures by the number of movies that contained tobacco use.³¹

²⁹ <http://www.worldwideboxoffice.com>. Accessed June 25, 2002.

³⁰ <http://www.boxofficeprophet.com>. Accessed June 25, 2002.

³¹ <http://smokefreemovies.uscf.edu/whoswho/directors.html>. Again, Glantz measures total separate occurrences, or shots/hour. Accessed October 1, 2002.

MOVIE BY MOVIE DATA

Pre-Settlement Movies

	Length of Tobacco Use (min)	Length of Brand Appearance (min)	Negative Statements About Tobacco Use
Titanic	4.50	0.00	Yes
My Best Friend's Wedding	2.85	0.10	Yes
Independence Day	1.68	See Notes	Yes
Jack	1.05	0.25	Yes
Beavis and Butthead Do America	0.88	0.00	No
Anaconda	0.82	See Notes	No
Batman and Robin	0.55	0.00	No
As Good as it Gets	0.42	0.00	No
Men in Black	0.40	0.15	No
Star Trek: First Contact	0.37	0.00	No
Mission: Impossible	0.32	0.13	No
The Cable Guy	0.15	0.00	No
Up Close and Personal	0.10	0.00	No
Tomorrow Never Dies	0.10	0.00	Yes
The Nutty Professor	0.08	0.00	No
Lost World: Jurassic Park II	0.05	0.00	No
Twister	0.00	0.00	No
Dragonheart	0.00	0.00	No
Liar Liar	0.00	0.00	No
Dante's Peak	0.00	0.00	No
Total Minutes	14.32	0.63	N/A
Average Minutes Per Film	0.89	0.04	N/A
Average Frames Per Film	1288.53	56.97	N/A

Notes:

- *Independence Day*: Cigar box shown for 4 seconds. The box has a company logo on it – a blue box with gold lettering – but no name. The viewer of the film did not know the specific company that uses that logo.
- *Anaconda*: 2 seconds of an almost identifiable brand on a cigarette box are shown.

Post-Settlement Movies

	Length of Tobacco Use (min)	Length of Brand Appearance (min)	Negative Statements About Tobacco Use
The Perfect Storm	7.10	See Notes	Yes
Wild Wild West	4.35	0.00	No
What Women Want	3.12	0.00	No
Notting Hill	3.03	0.00	No
X-Men	1.50	0.00	No
Charlie's Angels	1.43	0.00	No
Castaway	0.70	0.00	No
The World Is Not Enough	0.63	0.00	No
Austin Powers 2	0.43	0.00	No
The Family Man	0.37	See Notes	No
Blue Streak	0.37	0.00	Yes
Meet the Parents	0.35	See Notes	Yes
The Nutty Professor	0.27	0.00	No
Unbreakable	0.20	0.00	No
Entrapment	0.15	0.00	No
The Mummy	0.13	0.00	No
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	0.08	0.00	No
Mission: Impossible 2	0.02	0.00	No
The Sixth Sense	0.00	0.00	No
Big Daddy	0.00	0.00	No
The Haunting	0.00	0.00	No
What Lies Beneath	0.00	0.00	No
Total Minutes	24.23	0.00	N/A
Average Minutes Per Film	1.35	0.00	N/A
Average Frames Per Film	1938.64	0.00	N/A

Notes:

- *The Perfect Storm*: Cigarette packs shown have very similar design to Marlboro packs. Although the word, “Marlboro,” is never directly shown, the packaging clearly identifies the cigarette pack as being the Marlboro brand. Packs seen for a total of 22 seconds.
- *Meet the Parents*: 2 seconds of an almost identifiable brand on a cigarette box is shown. In a January 13, 2001, article by David Dale³², a smoking friend of the author’s said the brand was easily identified as Marlboro.
- *The Family Man*: Cigar box shown for 14 seconds. The box has a company logo on it – a white box with blue lettering – but no name. The viewer of the film did not know the specific company that uses that logo. The name “Hoya de Monterrey” is mentioned for 2 seconds.

³² <http://Old.smh.com.au/news/0101/13/features/features7.html>. Accessed August 1, 2002.