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**SMOKEFREE MOVIES**

**WEEK OF ACTION**

FEBRUARY 2-9, 2020

**RESOURCE KIT**

As Hollywood prepares for the Academy Awards on Sunday, February 9, it’s time to reveal the entertainment industry’s best-kept secret: **Smoking on screen kills in real life.** Millions of young lives are at risk. Alert your membership networks, your community, and public policymakers now…

**QUICK MESSAGES**

1) **Big Tobacco secretly bought its way on screen for decades.** The U.S. entertainment industry still refuses to give parents and audiences advance warning before exposing kids to tobacco imagery that is proven to recruit millions of new young smokers and kill them as adults.

2) **Tobacco on screen is the single biggest media risk to children and teens.** Hollywood has known of the danger since at least 2003. Yet movie studios and TV producers have never updated their rating systems to even mention smoking or tobacco. *They are concealing toxic content.*

3) **Ratings, warnings, and TV parental controls all need to be reinforced** to stop tobacco addiction from trapping another generation. With the streaming revolution now underway, it’s easier than ever for kids to watch movies and TV shows packed with toxic tobacco content.

**WHAT IS**

**HOLLYWOOD HIDING?**

**ANSWER #1** The [US Surgeon General](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobacco-use/) has concluded that exposure to smoking on screen causes large numbers of young people to take up tobacco. Tobacco is the [#1 cause of preventable death](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fast_facts/index.htm), killing 480,000 Americans per year.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) project that on-screen smoking will recruit [6.4 million new young smokers](https://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/sites/smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/files/CDC%20-%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%202015.pdf) in this generation, two million of whom will die from tobacco-induced cancer, heart disease, lung disease and stroke. The U.S. Surgeon General reports that making future youth-rated movies smokefree cut [reduce teen smoking rates](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/) by nearly 20 percent — preventing one million tobacco deaths from cancer and other diseases among today’s kids.

**ANSWER #2** Right now, there is no practical way for parents to know in advance if a movie or TV program includes toxic tobacco content. The film industry has refused to modernize its R-rating based on the conclusive scientific evidence that exposure to onscreen smoking causes kids to smoke.

The industry’s movie ratings and TV Parental Guidelines do not take smoking into account in their rating rules. Entertainment companies refuse to inform parents, saying there are no “industry standard,” yet the same companies block industry standards for smoking. Meanwhile smoking has [more than doubled](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6843a4.htm) in PG-13 movies since 2010, is spiking in R-rated films, and has [expanded on streaming channels](https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/tobacco-pop-culture/while-you-were-streaming-smoking-demand).

**ANSWER #3** In April 2019, [three U.S. Senators](http://bit.ly/2ojPVnf) wrote to a dozen major media companies and asked them two simple questions: How many of their films and TV shows showed tobacco use in the last five years? And how many children and teens saw these shows? We know movie studios track tobacco in their films. They also track the make-up of their audiences, in detail. An entire industry exists to gather and analyze audience data for Hollywood.

But when the companies answered the Senators, only one (YouTube) listed its shows with smoking. Not a single company reported how many kids saw its movies and TV shows with smoking. Most simply ignored the Senators’ request for basic child-safety data.

**ARE MPA “SMOKING” LABELS A FRAUD?**

In May 2007, the Motion Picture Association (the major movie studios’ trade group, which runs the movie ratings) announced it might add a small-print “smoking” label to movies with smoking. However, an audit of this program shows that from 2008 through 2019:\*

• 87 percent of top-grossing, youth-rated films with smoking are NOT labeled for smoking (342 of 392 films). No R-rated films carried a “smoking” label. Altogether, 94 percent of all films with smoking gave consumers no advance warning of their toxic tobacco content (779 of 829 films).

• The youth-rated films NOT labeled for smoking account for more than two-thirds (69%) of tobacco incidents (7,788 of 11,292 incidents) and more than three-quarters (76%) of domestic audience tobacco exposures from youth-rated films (74 billion of 97 billion tobacco impressions).

• Including films with smoking R-rated for other reasons, the MPA’s smoking labels cover only 11 percent of all tobacco incidents (3,504 of 30,819 incidents) and audience tobacco impressions (23 billion of 215 billion impressions).

• 89 percent of onscreen tobacco incidents and audience exposures are from films not labeled for smoking by the motion picture industry.

**IMPORTANT** | There is no research evidence that merely *labeling* a film will reduce harmful youth tobacco exposure. Leading health authorities recommend that future tobacco imagery be *R-rated*. The R rating is already used by the film industry to alert parents to content deemed inappropriate for children and teens and to reserve mature content for mature audiences.

The MPA has also [repeatedly claimed](https://smokefreemovies-prod.ucsf.edu/whos-accountable/mpaa) that rates movies for smoking. However, its own [rating rules](https://www.filmratings.com/Content/Downloads/rating_rules.pdf) (last revised in 2010) nowhere mention tobacco or smoking.

\* Source: Breathe California-UCSF Onscreen Tobacco Database and Motion Picture Association ratings bulletins, 2007-2019. The MPA announced in May 2007 that it was instituting a “smoking” descriptor program. This analysis begins in 2008, the first full year the program was in effect.

**THINGS TO DISCUSS**

Parents and policymakers who see only a few smoking labels on top-grossing films — only fifty labels total, from 2008 through 2019 — may be misled to think that only the few movies with labels actually contain smoking.

In fact, half (49%) of all top-grossing films were tobacco-contaminated from 2008 and 2019, including 14 percent of G/PG films and 47 percent of PG-13 films.

“Right to Know” is a basic principle in federal rules covering [food ingredients](https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition) and [workplace hazards](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/hazardoustoxicsubstances/) like cyanide, benzene and lead. But there is no rule that requires media companies to alert consumers to toxic tobacco content in their entertainment products. This content physically harms millions of children and teens recruited to smoke or vape.

The U.S. [Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act](https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/rules-regulations-and-guidance/family-smoking-prevention-and-tobacco-control-act-overview) (2009) and other statutes and legal agreements restrict tobacco promotion and sales to kids. A federal lawsuit ([United States v. Philip Morris](https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/topics/commercial-tobacco-control/commercial-tobacco-control-litigation/united-states-v-philip)) found the tobacco companies liable for violating the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) for their marketing to kids.

No media company has yet been held liable, despite tobacco industry documents that describe decades of collaboration to promote smoking and tobacco brands on TV and in hundreds of mainstream movies.

In the last three decades of the Twentieth Century, forty percent of the movies on [tobacco product placement lists](http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7kd981j3) were youth-rated. In the first two decades of the Twenty-First Century, *forty-five percent* of all top-grossing movies with smoking have been youth-rated.

On Jan. 2, 1971, the U.S. [Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act](https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/01/congress-bans-airing-cigarette-ads-april-1-1970-489882) banned tobacco commercials from TV and radio media regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The recent surge of smoking inside movies and TV shows directly undermines this law’s purpose: to protect children and adolescents from being physically exploited and addicted.\*

\* The broadcast ad ban — formally the Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act of 1969, 15 U.S.C. §§ 1331 et seq. — was challenged by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and others in *Capitol Broadcasting Co. v. Mitchell* (1972). They lost.

**THE 5 REAL SOLUTIONS**

U.S. Senators, state Attorneys General, and the national and international health community are agreed on most or all of the evidence-based solutions. These polices will keep tobacco industry influence at bay, permanently and substantially reduce kids’ exposure, and ensure that parents know which movies shows are smokefree and which carry a smoking hazard:

1 | Rate future movies and TV shows with smoking R or TV-MA, unless they exclusively depict tobacco use by actual, historical people who used tobacco (as in a biographical drama or documentary) or depict the real health consequences of tobacco/nicotine use.

2 | Require strong tobacco PSAs before any film or TV episode with smoking, regardless of genre or age-classification.

3 | Require certification of no tobacco pay-offs from each credited producer of a film or TV show with smoking.

4 | Keep tobacco branding out of all future films or TV shows, regardless of genre or age-classification.

5 | Make any media production with tobacco/nicotine content ineligible for public subsidies, such as tax credits and production rebates.

For policy details, visit this UCSF [Smokefree Movies page](https://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/policy-solutions).

\* “Smoking” is used here as shorthand for combustible, smokeless, and non-prescription nicotine delivery devices.

**PICK A TARGET**

Six companies sit on the Motion Picture Association (MPA) board. The MPA only does what these companies decide, so addressing the it directly is unproductive. We need to reach the top of the most influential companies. [Download names and addresses here](http://bit.ly/SFM-ActionWeek2020-Contacts).

If addressing all six media giants is impractical, focus on **Apple**, **Disney,** and **Netflix**.

Apple told Senators they would include content information for parents on Apple TV+. They haven’t. Disney dominates the U.S. movie market and just launched its own streaming service, Disney+. It also controls Hulu. With 61 million U.S. subscribers and 158 million worldwide, Netflix, is the largest streaming service, attracted notoriety in 2019 for packing smoking and cigarette brands into its #1 series, *Stranger Things* (TV-14).

All three companies promised to adopt parent-friendly policies in 2019. Apple is still hiding tobacco content. Disney has not updated its policy to cover newly acquired Hulu and Fox. Netflix has not published ANY policy related to its tobacco depiction practices.

**These companies must keep their promises in a transparent, verifiable way and to take the lead in setting life-saving industry standards.** Refer to the five policy solutions in this action kit.

**Three suggestions:**

**#1** | **Write snail-mail letters to media CEOs.** A short letter, personalizing your concerns as a young viewer, parent or grandparent, teacher or health professional attracts more attention because it’s an investment of time to write, stamp, and mail. See an example on the next page.

**#2** | **Post to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or another popular channel.** We’ve prepared a range of social media graphics and drafted some short social media messages to go with them. Make them our own. If you want to customize one of the graphic images, email us and we’ll send Photoshop (PSD) components you can resize and edit. Urge your network to sign the growing [online petition](https://www.change.org/p/mpaa-nato-r-rate-smoking-to-make-kid-rated-movies-smokefree).

#3 | **Add a “What is Hollywood hiding” item to your group’s e-mail newsletter or write a letter to the newspaper.** While focused on Oscar® week, feel free to extend this campaign at your convenience. And please tell us what you’ve done!

**SAMPLE LETTER**

Dear Mr./Ms. [CEO NAME],

If my child started to smoke, it would break my heart to think of what they would suffer in the future, long after I could be of any help to them.

Fifty years ago, the American people decided to stop showing cigarette commercials on TV because they harm children. But that didn’t stop tobacco promotion. Today, I see smoking inside TV shows popular with teens and in more than one-third of all kid-rated movies.

The U.S. Surgeon General has concluded that on-screen smoking causes kids to start smoking, just like those commercials did two generations ago.

Yet companies like yours have included tens of thousands of tobacco incidents your kid-rated movies and TV shows. You have refused to give mature ratings to smoking, the single most serious media danger to kids. Your industry has delivered hundreds of billions of tobacco exposures to moviegoers of all ages, and billions more from TV and streaming shows.

Last year, when U.S. Senators asked you — point-blank — how many of your media productions contain tobacco and how many kids see them, you would not share that basic child-safety information. Can you imagine any other industry doing that? I can’t.

What are you hiding? Why won’t you modernize your “R” and “TV-MA” ratings to give parents real warning? Better yet, why don’t you simply commit to keep tobacco imagery out of your future movies and TV shows … and then keep that life-saving promise?

I love movies and a good TV show. But you and I both know that entertainment is not worth addicting a single child, let alone causing real grief to million of families like yours and mine.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely…

**SOCIAL MESSAGES**

Smoking on screen kills in real life. #RateSmokingR [in Canada #RateSmoking18]. Sign the R-rating petition at Change.org <http://bit.ly/R-petition>.

Cigarette packs carry warnings. But hundreds of kid-rated movies and TV shows with smoking carry no warning at all. What is Hollywood hiding? Smoking on screen kills in real life. To #RateSmokingR, sign <http://bit.ly/R-petition>.

Fifty years ago, smoking commercials were banned from TV. Now smoking is packed inside hundreds of movies and TV shows. Keep smoking out of kid-rated shows to save a million lives. #RateSmokingR. Sign this <http://bit.ly/R-petition>.

Why are kids still starting to smoke and vape? Big Media has never stopped promoting nicotine addiction and early death. Hollywood refuses to keep smoking out of kid-rated films and TV. #RateSmokingR. Sign here! <http://bit.ly/R-petition>

Netflix packed Marlboros, Camels and other brands into #StrangerThings (TV-14). The only thing it won’t show? Any advance warning. What’s Hollywood hiding? Smoking on screen kills in real life. To #RateSmokingR, sign <http://bit.ly/R-petition>

Is any movie or TV show worth lung cancer? Why does Hollywood hide the fact that it still promotes smoking, the way it did in the 20th Century? It’s time to keep kid-rated films and TV smokefree. #RateSmokingR and sign <http://bit.ly/R-petition>

Kids’ biggest media risk isn’t what you think. Since 2002, 750 kid-rated movies packed with 19,900 smoking images have delivered 188 billion tobacco exposures to all ages. Save a million lives. #RateSmokingR at <http://bit.ly/R-petition>

They’re still pushing smoking at kids. But now, instead of billboards, it’s on TV and movie screens. To save a million lives, sign this growing petition at <http://bit.ly/R-petition>. It’s time to #RateSmokingR.

Since 2002, 750 kid-rated movies have promoted smoking. 99% of them are now showing on top streaming services with no advance warning. Stop Big Media from recruiting kids for Big Tobacco. Sign <http://bit.ly/R-petition> to #RateSmokingR.

**Note:** Movie, incident and exposure counts are from the Breathe California-University of California, San Francisco, Onscreen Tobacco Database; top-grossing film results through 2019.

**DATA TABLE**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **DATA FOR 2002-2019** | | |  |  |
|  | [In-theater tobacco impressions to Dec. 31 2019; films’ impressions may accumulate into 2020] | | | | |
|  | G/PG | PG-13 | Youth-rated | R-rated | Total |
| Top-grossing films | 525 | 1,141 | 1,666 | 901 | 2,567 |
| Films w/ smoking | 113 | 634 | 747 | 688 | 1,435 |
| % of all smoking films | 8% | 44% | 52% | 48% | 100% |
| % w/ smoking | 22% | 56% | 45% | 76% | 56% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| No. of tobacco incidents | 1,669 | 18,275 | 19,944 | 30,733 | 50,677 |
| % of all incidents | 3% | 36% | 39% | 61% | 100% |
| Incidents per smoking film | 15 | 29 | 27 | 45 | 35 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Audience tobacco impressions (Millions) | 12,036 | 176,362 | 188,398 | 181,643 | 370,042 |
| % of all impressions | 3% | 48% | 51% | 49% | 100% |
| Impressions per smoking film (Millions) | 107 | 278 | 252 | 264 | 258 |
| Impressions per ticket sold | 2 | 15 | 10 | 33 | 16 |

**ALSO USEFUL…**

• Our **tobacco breakout of this year’s Oscar-nominated films and performers** has been posted online. Download at <http://bit.ly/SFMaction-2020>.

• **What are streamers hiding?** On-demand channels will show anything these days, except advance warning on tobacco. We’re surveying streamers to see how much content information they share — and if parental controls FAIL on the biggest media risk to kids. Stay tuned!

**CONTACT**

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[Smokefree Movies](https://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/) is a project of the University of California, San Francisco, [Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education](https://tobacco.ucsf.edu/).