Smoke-free movies:

From evidence to action



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Introduction

Imagery emanating from motion pictures continues to provide misleadingly positive impressions of tobacco use. These images have now been identified as a cause of smoking initiation among adolescents. In 2008, the National Cancer Institute of the United States of America concluded that:

"the total weight of evidence from cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies, combined with the high theoretical plausibility from the perspective of social influences, indicates a causal relationship between exposure to movie smoking depictions and youth smoking initiation" (1).

Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) are required to implement a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship according to Article 13 of the treaty (2). The guidelines for implementation of Article 13 recognize that the depiction of tobacco in films is a form of tobacco promotion that can strongly influence tobacco use, particularly among young people, and recommends a set of specific measures, which are addressed more fully within this report (3). In some countries, many of the youth-rated films that contain tobacco imagery are the recipients of significant government production subsidies. These subsidies indirectly promote tobacco use through media, and therefore are counter to WHO FCTC Article 13 and its guidelines. The issue of subsidies will also be discussed in greater depth in this report.

In the past, movies have been an important vehicle for cigarette and other tobacco product $\{4\}^1$ placement, a form of advertising of tobacco products, as well as social learning $\{5\}^2$ about smoking. The marketing of tobacco in the movies, particularly movies originating from countries with the most active movie industries, remains an important vehicle for promoting smoking, including in films rated as suitable for children and adolescents.

Voluntary agreements with the tobacco industry to limit smoking in movies have not and cannot work because the fiduciary interests of the tobacco industry are opposite to those of the public health community. In the United States, the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) between states' Attorneys General and the major domestic tobacco manufacturers included a provision in which the manufacturers agreed to a prohibition on paid tobacco product placement in movies (6). However, evidence shows that smoking incidents increased in movies released subsequent to the MSA's 1998 implementation, peaking in 2005 (7).

Logic and science now support enforceable policies to reduce substantially smoking imagery in all film media. Measures to limit movie smoking, including those outlined in the Article 13 guidelines, and to end public subsidies for the production of movies with smoking, can ensure that motion pictures will no longer serve as a source of tobacco promotion aimed at young people. In addition, strong and enforceable policy measures can be supported by programmes to educate the public and policy-makers, as well as the entertainment industry, on the value of reducing young people's exposure to tobacco imagery.

Historically, cigarettes have been by far the most common tobacco product depicted in films, so this report concentrates on smoking in films. In recent years, the major cigarette companies have acquired smokeless tobacco firms and often promote these products using the same brand names as their major cigarette brands. In addition, new «e-cigarettes » have been promoted through motion picture tie-ins. Policy-makers need to integrate these changes into the tobacco marketplace when developing and implementing policies on tobacco product promotion in films and other media

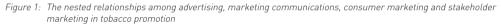
² The social learning theory of Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others.

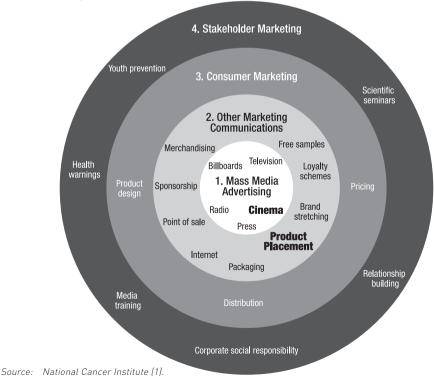
This document summarizes current knowledge about smoking in movies, as well as current and proposed approaches to reduce the impact of this imagery. The report aims to help countries understand the basis for taking action to limit the depiction of smoking in movies. This report can help the Parties to the WHO FCTC implement specific recommendations related to smoking in movies that are included in the Article 13 guidelines. In addition, it is expected that the report will also be useful to those countries that are not yet party to the treaty by helping them implement this important component of a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

1. Tobacco on screen: why this is a problem?

In the past, the tobacco industry has spent millions of dollars to maintain the portrayal of smoking in movies (8). The role of movies as vehicles for promoting smoking has become even more important as other forms of tobacco promotion are constrained. As shown in Figure 1, this investment³ is part of a wider and more complex marketing strategy to support pro-tobacco social norms, including product placement in mass media, sponsorship and other modalities. In this figure, cinema is shown to be a core element in mass media approaches to normalizing smoking.

According to the British Medical Association (BMA) (9), the United States National Cancer Institute (1), the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (7) and other sources, there are several reasons why smoking in movies should be addressed as a public health problem: movies reach every corner of the globe, effectively promote smoking and have done so without much public health scrutiny until now.





³ For the monetary value of tobacco companies' documented spending on Hollywood product placement agencies 1979–94, see http://www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/problem/bigtobacco.html.

1.1. MOVIES REACH EVERY CORNER OF THE WORLD

At least 7300 feature-length movies were produced and released in 2009 (many directly to video) in 50 nations worldwide, including: 1341 (18%) in the European Union, 1288 (18%) in India, 677 (9%) in the United States of America, 456 (6%) in the People's Republic of China and 448 (6%) in Japan (10). The small fraction of all movies produced in the United States accounts for more than half of global investment in movie production and distribution (11) and has consistently earned 60-70% of box office receipts outside the United States (12)⁴. A survey of 50 countries found only five in which the movies produced in those countries accounted for more than half of domestic theatre box office in 2008-2009: the United States (97%), India (90%), China (61%), Japan (58%), and Turkey (52%) (13).

The tobacco industry knows that motion pictures are one of humanity's most common entertainment experiences. The world spends approximately US\$ 120 billion a year to view films through legitimate distribution channels: US\$ 30 billion (25%) for single viewings in theatres and US\$ 90 billion (75%) for films on recorded video, over broadcast, satellite or cable, and through digital streaming or download. With 42 000 screens, 28% of the 150 000 global total, Canada and the United States accounted for one third of movie box office sales in 2010. Africa, Europe and the Middle East contributed another 33%, Asia and the Pacific region 27%, and Latin America 7% (14-16)⁵. India leads in actual admissions (2.9 billion in 2009) followed by the United States (1.3 billion) and China (264 million) (17). As movies have become more widely available on video and digital media, per capita admissions to movie theatres have stabilized or dropped since 2005 in some major economies, but increased in others as theatres have upgraded to digital and 3-D presentations (18). Rapid spread of multiple media platforms for viewing movies outside of theatres, across cultures and economies, means that exposure to film content is vastly underestimated by movie theatre attendance data alone (see Annex A).

1.2 Movies are effective in promoting smoking

Exposure to smoking in movies is high

An analysis of more than 1300 feature films accounting for 96% of all ticket sales in the United States between 2002 and 2010 found that tobacco imagery permeated both youth-rated (G/PG/PG-13) and adult-rated (R) movies, with 62% of top-grossing (19)6 films featuring tobacco imagery. More specifically, 81% of all R-rated movies included smoking, while smoking appeared in 66% of movies rated PG-13 and 27% of movies rated G or PG. Altogether, top-grossing movies of all ratings distributed in the United States between 2002 and 2010 contained approximately 7500 tobacco incidents. Of these incidents, 56% were in movies rated R; 39% in movies rated PG-13; and 5% in movies rated G or PG (see Box 1 for an explanation of the United States' rating system). The number of tobacco

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