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## **Media Shareholders Tell Major Studios, “Quit Smoking In Youth-Rated Movies”**

*With the holiday movie season upon us, shareholders say the biggest media companies must stop releasing youth-rated movies with smoking, cited by the U.S. Surgeon for causing children to smoke*

Opening a new front in the fight to keep blockbuster movies from recruiting thousands of new young smokers, investors in the nation’s largest media companies are filing a wave of shareholder resolutions calling on their corporate boards to implement a recent Surgeon General recommendation by voluntarily giving an R rating to all movies with smoking, or taking equivalent measures to keep smoking out of future productions anticipated to carry G, PG, or PG-13 ratings.

Investors felt compelled to file shareholder resolutions after a year that saw the U.S. Surgeon General release a [landmark report](#) concluding that exposure to on-screen smoking causes children to smoke. This also prompted 38 state attorney generals to [write media company](#) CEOs, in the spring of 2012, that "each time the industry releases another movie that depicts smoking, it does so with the full knowledge of the harm it will bring children who watch it."

"The U.S. Surgeon General, the nation's doctor, has concluded there isn't just a connection, there is a causal relationship between children’s exposure to smoking on screen and their starting to smoke. This makes the movie companies potentially culpable," says Reverend Michael Crosby, Tobacco Program Coordinator at the [Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility](#) (ICCR).

As of December 19, shareholder resolutions have been filed at Time Warner (Warner Bros.), CBS, and Comcast (NBC Universal) by ICCR members. [As You Sow](#), a nonprofit organization that promotes corporate responsibility through shareholder advocacy, and members of ICCR also intend to submit resolutions to Disney, News Corp (Fox), Sony, and Viacom (Paramount) in the first quarter of 2013.

“Investors are concerned about the financial, legal, and reputation risks these studios may bear due to the health impact on children and teens that are exposed to smoking in the movies they watch,” said Cathy Rowan, Director, Socially Responsible Investments for Trinity Health, an ICCR member.

National medical organizations including the American Medical Association, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics have joined the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.N.’s World Health Organization in calling for the elimination of smoking in youth movies or the adoption of an R rating for any film that shows tobacco use. The rating would have just two exceptions: films that portray actual historical figures that used tobacco, like Disney’s *Lincoln*, or movies that depict the negative effects of tobacco use.

“Despite the concern expressed by the nation’s leading medical and law enforcement authorities, smoking in movies rated appropriate for kids has increased,” said Michael Passoff, Senior Strategist at As You Sow. Tobacco incidents per youth-rated film jumped 34% and tobacco impressions delivered to U.S. audiences by youth-rated films nearly doubled, to 10.7 billion, from 2010 to 2011, according to a journal of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Between 2005 and 2007, Disney, Time Warner, and Comcast (Universal) published policies on depictions of smoking in their movies. The three companies reduced youth-rated tobacco incidents to nearly zero in 2010, but in 2011, their levels shot up nearly ten times. Backsliding has led health experts and shareholders to challenge the studios’ anti-smoking policies’ vague language, loopholes, and limitations. Sony published its first policy on tobacco depictions on December 7, 2012.

“A mandatory R rating for smoking would create a strong market incentive for producers and studios to leave tobacco out of the movies that children see most,” said Corinne Bendersky, Program Manager, As You Sow.

PG-13 blockbusters like *Skyfall* (Sony), *Taken 2* (News Corp.), and *The Hobbit* (Times Warner), have delivered billions of tobacco impressions to U.S. theater audiences. The studios have released more than 60 top-grossing movies with smoking imagery so far in 2012, 40% of them rated PG or PG-13.

The Time Warner resolution was filed by the Adrian Dominican Sisters, Catholic Health East, Dignity Health, Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, and Trinity Health. The Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order filed the resolution with CBS and the Comcast filers are Midwest Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, and Trinity Health.

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**As You Sow** is a nonprofit organization that promotes environmental and social corporate responsibility through shareholder advocacy, coalition building, and innovative legal strategies. For more information visit [www.asyousow.org](http://www.asyousow.org).

**ICCR ([www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)):** Currently celebrating its 41<sup>st</sup> year, ICCR is the pioneer coalition of active shareholders who view the management of their investments as a catalyst for change. Its 300 member organizations with over \$100 billion in AUM have an enduring record of corporate engagement that has demonstrated influence on policies promoting justice and sustainability in the world.