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Surgeon General 50th Anniversary Smoking Report Links Hollywood to Youth Deaths

***Removing smoking from youth rated movies can save
over a million lives every year***

OAKLAND, CA - The 50th anniversary Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health, released today, called on Hollywood movie studios to eliminate images of smoking from youth rated movies, saying that doing so, "...could have a significant effect on preventing youth from becoming tobacco users and could save over a million lives." Implementing this policy by modernizing the movie ratings system to give these films an R rating would, according to the report, reduce youth smoking by 18% and reduce smoking deaths significantly.

In January 1964 the ninth Surgeon General, Dr. Luther Terry, laid the foundation for tobacco control efforts in the U.S. with the first Report on Smoking and Health. Through the efforts of tobacco control professionals, advocates, and researchers the work has continued to move forward with clean indoor air laws, taxes that increased the price of tobacco products, warning labels, and the elimination of TV advertising. "Thanks to the television broadcast ad ban, movies remain the most important mass media channel addicting kids to cigarettes," says Andrew Behar, CEO of As You Sow, an environmental health advocacy organization based in Oakland California.

For over ten years, shareholder advocates including As You Sow, Father Michael Crosby, a Capuchin Franciscan based in Milwaukee, and Cathy Rowan, Director of Socially Responsible Investments for CHE Trinity Health and other faith-based members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, have been pressing the major media corporations that own the Hollywood studios to get smoking out of their youth rated movies. They have filed shareholder resolutions and engaged with Time-Warner, Viacom, FOX, Sony, Comcast, Disney, and other studios, resulting in the creation and disclosure of youth smoking public policies by each studio and leading initially to significant reduction in the incidents of smoking in youth rated movies.

However, according to the Surgeon General, "Portrayals of tobacco use in U.S. films appears to have rebounded upward in the past 2 years. In 2012, youth were exposed to an estimated 14.8 billion in-theater tobacco-use impressions in youth rated films...if current trends continue, 5.6 million US youth who are currently younger than 18 years of age will die prematurely during adulthood from their smoking."

According to Behar, "In 2012 the Surgeon General concluded that onscreen smoking has a direct causal link to youths starting to smoke and recommended an R rating for those films. The media companies that control the rating system through the MPAA should act on the Surgeon General's plea for an R rating, and stop addicting kids to tobacco."



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Father Michael Crosby added that, “Even with the overall reductions in on-screen smoking, as faith-based shareholders concerned about peoples’ health, we see the impact of an estimated 14.8 billion tobacco-use impressions in PG and PG-13 rated movies. Data has shown these almost countless impressions to young people can initiate a lifelong addiction leading to heart disease, pulmonary problems, and cancer.”

Cathy Rowan of CHE Trinity Health stated, “We have always emphasized in our shareholder dialogues with the major movie studios that depicting tobacco in movies is a public health issue. The studios have responded with policies and practices, but the fact that children and youth remain exposed to smoking indicates that the best solution is to act on the Surgeon General’s call.”

Stanton Glantz, PhD, Professor of Medicine, American Legacy Foundation Distinguished Professor of Tobacco Control at the University of California San Francisco and director of the Smoke Free Movies campaign said, “The impact of getting smoking out of youth rated films will be huge in terms of public health benefit eventually reducing smoking deaths by 18% every year or one million deaths. The movie industry must take this seriously and realize that their actions to remove all smoking from youth rated moving is the most rapid and inexpensive way to solve this problem that will be felt by kids in the US and, as these films are exported around the world, globally.”

The release of today’s report is a call to action for major media companies to take responsibility for the images in their films that lead to smoking initiation and a lifetime of addiction and compromised health for their youngest and most impressionable customers.

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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.

The Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility is a coalition of 300 faith-based institutions using their estimated \$200 billion to further their environmental, social and governance values. For more information visit www.iccr.org.

CHE Trinity Health is the second-largest Catholic health care delivery system in the nation. It serves people and communities in 20 states from coast to coast with 82 hospitals, 88 continuing care facilities and home health and hospice programs that provide more than 2.3 million visits annually. It was formed in May 2013, when Trinity Health and Catholic Health East completed their consolidation to strengthen their shared mission, increase excellence in care and advance transformative efforts with their unified voice. For more information, visit www.trinity-health.org, www.che.org, or www.newhealthministry.org.

The University of California San Francisco Smoke Free Movies Project has been working since 2001 to reduce the number of adolescents that the motion picture industry delivers to Big Tobacco every year. Its director, Stanton A. Glantz, PhD, is a Professor of Medicine, American Legacy Foundation Distinguished Professor of Tobacco Control, and Director of the UCSF Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education. For more information visit smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu.