



Smoke Free Movies has proposed four measures to make sure that the film industry does not act as a marketing arm of the tobacco industry. None involves censorship. All are widely endorsed, including by the World Health Organization.

1) Certify no pay-offs

Given Big Tobacco's well-documented history of secret product placement—and the upsurge of smoking in movies—public confidence could be restored if every new smoking movie ran the following affidavit in its closing credits: "No person or entity involved in this motion picture accepted anything from any tobacco company, its agents or fronts."

In 1990, Big Tobacco changed its own voluntary promotional policies to bar paid brand placement. In 1998, in settling Minnesota's lawsuit against the tobacco industry as well as in the Master Settlement Agreement with 46 state Attorneys General, Big Tobacco again agreed to stop promoting smoking in the movies. Unless Big Tobacco is violating or skirting these agreements, it should be a simple matter for producers to certify that nobody involved in a motion picture benefited from the appearance of smoking or tobacco images in a film.

STATUS: Time Warner, alone among the major media companies, now adds this statement in the closing credits of selected films.

2) Require anti-smoking ads

All appearances of smoking in a film, unless dramatically associated with illness or death, tend to glamorize it. Whether it is the hero (success) or the villain (rebellion) who smokes does not matter—either one reinforces tobacco advertising themes. Counter-advertising is effective because it interrupts the fantasy aspects of smoking and makes audiences into critical viewers.

Exhibitors should run effective anti-tobacco spots before all smoking feature films. Spots should also be added to newly-released videos and DVDs of smoking films, regardless of rating; many teens view R-rated movies through those media.

STATUS: All major studios and Weinstein add anti-tobacco spots to their youth-rated DVDs with smoking, but they are not used in theaters or other channels, nor (except for Weinstein and Warner) on R-rated videos with smoking.

3) Stop identifying brands

Any smoking in a movie promotes smoking. But the visual endorsement of specific brands consistently occurs in about 12% of movies with smoking. Marlboro makes by far the most appearances in top-grossing films. There is no excuse for brand display and promotion.

STATUS: Several studios have published policies on movie smoking. None addresses brand display or tobacco deals by the production companies that make the films.

4) Rate new smoking movies "R"

Except in the rare case when a film depicts the smoking of an actual historical figure who smoked, or unambiguously reflects the dire health consequences of tobacco use, all new movies with tobacco imagery should be rated "R" by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA).

The R-rating will give producers an incentive to calibrate tobacco imagery, just they now routinely calibrate sex, violence and language to earn a desired rating. It is projected that the R-rating will reduce teen exposure to tobacco imagery by 60% or more, preventing 200,000 teens from starting to smoke each year and averting 60,000 future tobacco deaths annually.

An R-rating, backed by 70% or more of adults in polls, will also help parents safeguard children against smoking promotion when choosing movies or videos.

Here is a suggested standard for the MPAA to adopt, modeled on its policy for language:

Even one use of tobacco or presentation of tobacco advertising or similar pro-tobacco imagery must lead the Rating Board to issue a film an R-rating. These films can be rated less severely, however, if by a special vote, the Ratings Board feels that the presentation of tobacco clearly and unambiguously reflects the dangers and consequences of tobacco use or accurately represents the smoking behavior of an actual historical figure, so that a lesser rating would more responsibly reflect the opinion of American parents.

STATUS: The MPAA now claims to "consider" smoking in its ratings, but has never up-rated a theatrical release for smoking and fails even to label for smoking most nationally-released, youth-rated films with tobacco.