

[CITY / COUNTY LETTERHEAD]

[DRAFT LETTER TO MOVIE THEATER MANAGERS; cc: CHAIN CEOs]

Dear [Theater Manager]:

On [DATE], the [COUNCIL] resolved unanimously to support voluntary efforts to sharply reduce adolescent exposure to smoking in films rated G, PG and PG-13. Researchers have concluded that exposure to on-screen smoking recruits half of all new U.S. smokers: 390,000 teens a year, of whom 120,000 will ultimately die from tobacco-caused cancers and heart and lung disease.

These published studies have convinced science-based health organizations* to endorse policies, including an R-rating for smoking content (with certain defined exceptions), that will cut adolescent exposure in half, avert almost 200,000 new tobacco addictions annually, and prevent 60,000 deaths a year in future years.

As an exhibitor, you have a degree of influence on the motion pictures distributed to you. The studios will listen if you tell them that our community is deeply concerned about tobacco use in youth-rated movies. We assure you that this concern is spreading nationally and globally.

You are also in a position to explain to the studios controlling the ratings that the “R” is a reasonable solution. A PG-13 “warning” that keeps smoking out of G and PG films would reduce adolescents’ exposure by less than 5 percent; clearing all smoking from films would require official censorship, which nobody wants. Simply update the ratings to reflect scientific findings — and treat smoking, which kills 453,000 Americans a year, as seriously as the MPAA now treats legally-protected, offensive language that kills nobody.

As you report box office numbers, you can remind the studios that on-screen smoking does not sell a single movie ticket, but it is definitely proven to sell cigarettes. Of course, studio veterans know this already; for decades the tobacco industry invested millions of dollars in Hollywood to get their products on screen. But why should you, the exhibitor, take the brunt of community criticism when it is the studios that benefited in the past and increasingly push smoking at the age group most likely to start smoking: kids 12-17?

The [COUNCIL] understands from studies by the Federal Trade Commission and others that an R is only 50 percent efficient at restricting adolescents’ theater access to R-rated films. (It reduces their viewing of R-rated videos by about the same degree.) Yet until the MPAA ratings are updated to keep smoking out of most future films rated G, PG and PG-13, extending your current admission practices for R-rated movies to films with smoking rated G, PG and PG-13 is the single most valuable contribution to community health that you can make.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control cite adolescent exposure to on-screen smoking as a primary reason the national decline in teen smoking has stalled in recent years. Won’t you help stop tobacco addiction and death taking hold in another generation? Your participation is purely

*American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Legacy Foundation, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, the Society for Adolescent Medicine and others, including the N.Y. State Dept. of Health and L.A. County Dept. of Health Services.

voluntary, but it can make a tremendous difference — altering the practice of an entire industry, preventing hundreds of thousands of deaths in the United States around the world.

- In admission policies, treat G, PG and PG-13 movies with smoking just like you treat R-rated movies. An accurate list of the week's top-grossing films with smoking can be found at www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu. Click “Now showing.”

Other measures we encourage you to adopt:

- Introduce anti-tobacco spots or slides before movies with smoking. These are demonstrated to inoculate audiences against smoking's promotional effect without reducing the number of people who would recommend the movie to friends. (A cinema chain in Ontario, Canada, has just launched a year-long series of anti-tobacco slides.)

- Tag posters for youth-rated movies that include smoking with a “Warning: Tobacco on screen recruits young smokers” label. Have a fact sheet available for patrons explaining the issue and its particular threat to children of non-smoking parents.

- Communicate public concerns about smoking in youth-rated movies up the management ladder. Urge management to open a dialogue with distributors at events such as ShoWest and with the state and national leadership of NATO to genuinely resolve this industry-wide problem.

The 120,000 deaths attributable to smoking on screen are more than all the U.S. deaths from preventable causes such as drunk driving, violent crime, illicit drug use and unsafe sex — combined. A simple, reasonable solution is available. But with every day that passes, more teens are recruited to smoke by what they see in on your screens.

We appreciate your attention to this important topic. Your role is key. To learn more about the issue of smoking in youth-rated movies — and the epidemiological evidence behind the health community's serious concern — we suggest this online resource maintained by the University of California-San Francisco Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education: smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu.

Cordially,