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AMA Alliance Warns Parents About Smoking in “The Incredible Hulk,” Other Summer Blockbusters

*AMA Alliance, Legacy Foundation, Leading Public Health Advocates
Call for R Rating for Films with Tobacco Imagery*

CHICAGO — The American Medical Association (AMA) Alliance warned parents today of yet another Hollywood film that exposes underage audiences to unnecessary smoking: “The Incredible Hulk.” The AMA Alliance, the volunteer arm of the American Medical Association (AMA), includes more than 27,000 grassroots members working in their communities to protect children and promote healthy lifestyles. Over the past two years, they have paid particular attention to smoking in motion pictures, and they are calling for an R rating for any film with irresponsible or gratuitous tobacco images.

Universal Studios’ “The Incredible Hulk” (PG-13) opens June 13 and is one of the summer’s most anticipated movies. The film is a follow-up to 2003’s “Hulk,” which was also PG-13 but did not contain tobacco imagery. General Thaddeus ‘Thunderbolt’ Ross is a character who did not smoke at all during his appearances in the first film, but he is shown puffing on a cigar in nearly every scene in this sequel.

“Shame on ‘The Incredible Hulk’ for unnecessarily adding smoking to a sequel that would have been just as exciting and believable without it,” said Dianne Fenyk, President of the Alliance. “Universal Studios and the other Hollywood studios should be especially embarrassed for using comic book movies, which they market to children and know youth will want to see, to promote tobacco.”

Other recent examples of smoking in movies based on comic books or children’s television series include: “Iron Man” (PG-13; 2008); “Speed Racer” (PG; 2008); “X-Men: The Last Stand” (PG-13; 2006); “Superman Returns” (PG-13; 2006) and “Spider Man 2” (PG-13; 2004).

The AMA Alliance was also particularly surprised to find tobacco imagery because of the people involved in “The Incredible Hulk.” Its leading actor, Edward Norton, has stated, “I don’t smoke, and...I am not a fan of gratuitous smoking in films.” And after Marvel Comics’ editor-in-chief, Joe Quesada, lost his father to smoking-related lung disease, he took the bold step of removing all smoking from Marvel characters that previously smoked.

“Movies remain a major influence on our children, affecting their behavior and shaping their perceptions of what is normal — and even ‘cool,’” added Fenyk. “The motion picture industry knows this and has taken action by giving an R rating to movies that depict drug and alcohol use, strong language or sexual behavior, and violence. Yet smoking, the deadliest of all addictions, continues in youth-rated films, even when their own industry colleagues oppose smoking in films.”

Experts estimate that 3,900 children ages 12-17 try their first cigarette every day in the United States. Studies also prove that 35 percent of new smoking in children ages 9-12 can be attributed to exposure to smoking in movies — and that exposure to such tobacco imagery predicts established smoking behavior in adolescents.

May 10th marked the one year anniversary of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) announcing a change to its rating systems for movies with smoking. They stated that “all smoking will be considered” with the goal being to enhance “the amount of information provided to parents on the issue of smoking in films.”

But a year later, the MPAA continues to give PG and PG-13 ratings to films with smoking. According to an analysis by public health advocates of top box office films released in the 12 months following the MPAA announcement, 38 percent of G and PG movies and 58 percent of PG-13 movies featured tobacco products. More than half of all top box office films with smoking in the 2007-2008 time period were youth-rated.

The same 12-month study found that 9 out of 10 youth-rated films carried no tobacco warning in its description at all, and there is no evidence that the MPAA increased the rating of any film to R because of smoking content.

“Over the last few years, tobacco marketing geared to children has rightly been phased out of the mainstream,” said Dr. Gail Arthur, an AMA Alliance member, parent and pediatrician from Harrisonburg, Virginia. “We need Universal Studios and the other Hollywood studios to be part of a solution that discourages smoking and reduces tobacco’s influence. That doesn’t mean inconsistently burying warnings in the fine print. It means upgrading any films with unnecessary smoking to an R rating.”

In October 2006, the AMA Alliance joined the American Legacy Foundation to launch Screen Out!, a campaign fighting for a mandatory R rating on all films that depict unnecessary or irresponsible smoking. The AMA Alliance also recommends eliminating product placements of specific tobacco brands, certifying that no studios benefit from placements, and running effective anti-smoking ads before any film with smoking.

“Instances of tobacco imagery in youth-rated films are particularly alarming,” said American Legacy Foundation President and CEO Cheryl Heaton, Dr. PH. “We hope that parents will consider the impacts that smoking in movies can have on their own children and feel empowered to build the momentum behind this issue on a national level.”

The AMA Alliance is encouraging its 27,000 members to alert their local media and communities about the smoking in “The Incredible Hulk,” as well as to continue pressuring the MPAA, Universal Studios and its other studio members to remove smoking once-and-for-all from youth-rated films.

The studios (Paramount, Disney Pictures, Sony Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Universal and Warner Brothers) are owned by the media corporations that make up the MPAA: Disney, Time Warner, Sony, Viacom, General Electric and the News Corporation.

About the AMA Alliance

The AMA Alliance, the volunteer arm of the American Medical Association, is committed to public health promotion in their organizational mission. A not-for-profit organization of more than 26,000 grassroots members working in their communities, the AMA Alliance strives to ensure child safety, prevent abuse and violence, promote healthy lifestyles and increase awareness of available health care resources. Visit www.screenout.org.

About the American Legacy Foundation

The American Legacy Foundation[®] is dedicated to building a world where young people reject tobacco and anyone can quit. The Washington, D.C., foundation develops programs that address the health effects of tobacco, especially among vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by the toll of tobacco, through grants, technical assistance and training, partnerships, youth activism, and counter-marketing and grassroots marketing campaigns. The Foundation was created from the November 1998 Master Settlement Agreement reached between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. Visit <http://www.americanlegacy.org>.