The tobacco industry won’t mind if smoking movies are rated PG13. Thirteen-year-olds will still see them.

What’s wrong with big stars showing kids how to smoke? With tobacco ads barred from TV and billboards, film is about the only medium left to promote tobacco in the U.S. and worldwide. And it works. Studies find that teens who view lots of smoking on screen are two and a half times as likely to start smoking. Even if friends and parents don’t.

Only two industries in America act as if pushing poison to kids is a legitimate business.

One is Big Tobacco. Publicly it denies marketing to the young — yet battles all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn any limit on its ability to do so. The other? Hollywood.

Movies and videos aimed at children and teens are carrying more smoking scenes [see box]. In fact, as theaters have tightened up on kids being admitted to R-rated movies, smoking has intruded even deeper into movies rated G, PG and PG15.

Is this simply coincidence? Only ten years ago, the tobacco industry was paying cash to place its brands in films (it denies payola now, just as it did to Congress in 1989).

And Big Tobacco has long used film stars to glamorize cigarettes, killing many of them in the process. Has anything actually changed?

Not a single tobacco company has ever objected to having its brand trademarks displayed in any movie.

Tobacco kills one in three smokers — more Americans than violence, drunk driving, outlawed drugs and HIV/AIDS combined — but just 6% of top-grossing smoking movies even hint that smoking or secondhand smoke is damaging.

That’s “realism”? The reality is, Hollywood does Big Tobacco’s dirty work.

Like It

IN ABOUT A BOY, rated PG13, filmidn’s star and chain-smokes around a 12-year-old boy he’s mentoring. Another recent PG13, Life or Something Like It, paired Angelina Jolie with Camels. Hollywood began to introduce smoking into more kid-rated movies after Congress pressed the industry to keep more teens out of movies rated R...

Rating smoking films R, in contrast, might actually keep more teenagers from seeing films that play into Big Tobacco’s marketing plans.

Both Big Tobacco and Hollywood promote smoking. Both are in hot pursuit of the same teenage audience.

Which industry do you work for? How can you tell? Our suggestions:

1] Roll on-screen credits certifying that nobody on a production accepted anything of value from any tobacco company, its agents or fronts.

2] Run strong anti-tobacco ads in front of smoking movies. Put them on tapes and DVDs, too. Strong spots are proven to immunize audiences.

3] Quit identifying tobacco brands in the background or in action. Brand names are unnecessary.

4] Rate new smoking movies “R” to give parents genuine power to protect children against the tobacco industry.

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Get the inside story at SmokeFreeMovies.ucsf.edu

Smoke Free Movies aims to sharply reduce the film industry’s usefulness to Big Tobacco’s domestic and global marketing — a leading cause of disability and premature death. This initiative by Stanton Glantz, PhD (coauthor of The Cigarette Papers and Tobacco War), of the UCSF School of Medicine is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, and Preventing Tobacco Addiction. To learn how you can help, visit our website or write to us: Smoke Free Movies, UCSF School of Medicine, Box 0130, San Francisco, CA 94143-0130.