A published study of movie industry professionals finds that they confuse smoking on screen with the words in the headline. But for the audience, smoking in the movies can mean only one of two things: corruption or stupidity. Here’s why.

For years, the world’s largest and most powerful tobacco companies secretly paid Hollywood off to get their addictive and lethal products into the movies. The payola supposedly stopped in 1989, after the scandal grew so obvious it brought threats of federal regulation.

After all, smoking in movies is a way to get around the 1970 ban on TV ads ever were, because “the public is unaware of the sponsor.”

The problem is, the industry’s self-policed ban on Hollywood tobacco payoffs hasn’t worked. There’s more smoking in the movies today than before 1989. And stars are still lighting up and displaying brands — priceless celebrity endorsements repeated in perpetuity on TV, tapes, DVDs and cable.

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