MPAA’s tobacco raters spared 11 kid-rated blockbusters with smoking, but tagged 14 films in limited release. Coincidence?

In the first six months since the MPAA announced that it was considering tobacco depictions in its movie ratings, last May, ratings were nothing but inconsistent.

Non-MPAA members were three times more likely to be tagged for smoking than MPAA member companies.

Independents and major studios had almost equal numbers of kid-rated movies with smoking rated and released May 10-November 10: twelve and thirteen, respectively. Yet eleven indie films were tagged for smoking, compared to only three films from the major studios that control the MPAA.

All films tagged for smoking were given limited release or sent straight to video.

Of the eleven top box office movies with smoking rated G, PG or PG-15 after May 10 and released by November 10, none were given tobacco descriptors. Of the fourteen films that were rated with tobacco descriptors after May 10 and released by November 10, all were given limited release or were sent straight to video.

Box office for the films with tobacco descriptors: $3.7 million. For the kid-rated national releases with smoking: $740 million.

Top box office films released May 10-November 10 delivered an estimated 11 billion tobacco impressions to theater audiences, no change from similar periods in recent years.

Instead of inconsistent, unreliable and ineffective tobacco descriptors on kid-rated films, should there be a simple, fair R-rating for tobacco that protects the audience—not the studios doing the most harm?

Read 6-month ratings review at SmokeFreeMovies.ucsf.edu

Correction: An arithmetic error in the analysis of MPAA tobacco ratings at 6 months, reported in this publication on November 6, led to a substantial underestimate of 2006 PG-13 tobacco impressions and the consequent conclusion that 2007 PG-13 impressions were triple those of the year before. In fact, no significant change occurred in the 6 month periods in 2007, compared to the same periods in 2003-6.