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Health Unit Pushes to Butt Out Smoking in Movies

Board of Health Endorses Policy Recommendations by the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies

The Peterborough County-City Board of Health endorsed five policy recommendations to reduce exposure of youth to smoking in movies at tonight's board meeting.

"There is abundant scientific evidence that links exposure to smoking in movies and youth smoking initiation," said Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, Medical Officer of Health for the Health Unit. "We know tobacco imagery pervades youth entertainment choices and that this is one reason why local youth start smoking. The board's advocacy of smoke-free movies reflects their commitment to address this serious health issue at all levels because they understand our youth are affected by cultural influences that come from beyond our borders."

The five policy recommendations endorsed by the Board of Health were developed by the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies and call for the following changes to the provincial movie industry:

1. Rate new movies with smoking 18A in Ontario, with the sole exceptions being when the tobacco presentation clearly and unambiguously reflects the dangers and consequences of tobacco use or is necessary to represent smoking of a real historical figure.
2. Require producers to certify on-screen that no one involved in the production of the movie received anything of value in consideration for using or displaying tobacco.
3. Require strong anti-smoking ads to be shown before any movie with tobacco use at the distributor's expense, regardless of rating and distribution channel.
4. Require producers to stop identifying tobacco brands.
5. Require that films with tobacco imagery assigned a G, PG or 14A rating be ineligible for federal and provincial film subsidies.

To date, at least 12 Ontario health units have sent letters of endorsement to the Coalition.

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Quick Facts:

- Film ratings directly affect the amount of exposure to tobacco in films that young people receive.
- In Canada, the majority of films released in 2009 were youth-rated, and 1.117 billion tobacco impressions were delivered in G/PG/14A films in theatres. The number of tobacco impressions is calculated by multiplying the number of tobacco incidents per film by the number of paid admissions per film.
- While reports of in-theatre tobacco depictions represent an index of exposure, they underestimate the total tobacco impressions delivered, since films are also viewed on DVD and Blu-ray™, video-on-demand, cable, satellite, and broadcast and broadband media.
- Although most movies viewed in Canada are produced by U.S. companies, the number of youth-rated films with tobacco depictions shown in theatres is higher in Canada than the U.S. because provincial film boards classify more movies as 14A or PG that are rated R in the U.S.
- In 2009, 125 of the 145 movies with tobacco released in Canadian theatres were youth-rated films (G, PG, 14A) delivering more than two-thirds (68%) of all in theatre tobacco impressions.

To download the Health Unit's staff report on smoke-free movies, visit www.pcchu.ca or click on www.smokefreemovies.ca for more information.

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