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August 27, 2008

The Los Angeles Times  
Letters to the Editor  
202 West First Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Editor:


("Smoking in the Movies," August 23) While your editorial stance in favor of running anti-tobacco spots before the presentation of movies with smoking is appreciated, your opposition to an R-rating of those films is especially disappointing given recent findings of the National Cancer Institute.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) report concludes, based on a review of all the evidence, that many youth begin smoking as a direct result of the smoking imagery they see in films. The report also concludes that the tobacco industry's youth smoking prevention campaigns have been generally ineffective and may actually increase youth smoking.

The NCI report serves as a call for stronger action to implement a meaningful ratings policy that will reduce smoking in youth-rated films, including an R-rating for all movies with non-historical depictions of smoking. On-screen violence and drug use are already rated "R" by the film industry's own rating system. No studio calls these ratings "censorship." The film industry's rating system cannot bar filmmakers from directing any of his or her actor's from using a cancerous prop. They would simply need to accept an R-rating if they did so, just as they now routinely calibrate strong language, violence and sexual imagery to achieve certain ratings. Without an R-rating, movies with G, PG, and PG-13 ratings will portray smoking. And, these films will continue to recruit new teen smokers via their on-screen images --leading to far more U.S. deaths than real-life violence and drug use combined.

It is important to note that the anti-tobacco spot policy is designed to work alongside the R-rating — mitigating teens' exposure to R-rated films with smoking — not as a stand-alone solution. Instituting an R-rating for smoking would keep future youth-rated films, those receiving less than an R-rating, smoke-free and create a strong disincentive for the tobacco industry to try to influence the content of the movies that adolescents are most likely to see.

Sincerely,

  
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Director of Public Health and Health Officer  
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