

Which major studio is blocking an R-rating for smoking?

On October 6, 2006, the MPAA told the state Attorneys General that it would be “collaborating with the renowned Harvard School of Public Health” to address smoking in films.

The objective? To gain “consensus among the member companies of MPAA on Harvard’s pending recommendations, and then begin implementation.”

On February 23, 2007, Harvard delivered its recommendation to the MPAA and other Hollywood heavyweights: “Take substantive and effective action to eliminate the depiction of tobacco smoking from films accessible to children and youths.”

Harvard’s experts added, “What’s needed is a movie ratings policy that creates an incentive for filmmakers to consider, and worry about, the depiction of smoking as a factor in the determination of a film’s rating... [T]he goal should be the elimination (with rare exceptions) of smoking from youth-rated films.”*

In March, the Hollywood trade press reported expectations that the MPAA would announce a rating solution for tobacco at ShoWest. Instead, ShoWest heard platitudes about “gratuitous” smoking lifted from three year-old Senate testimony by the MPAA—a step *backward*.

What happened between late February and mid-March we can only guess. But the MPAA needs consensus among the major studios to make policy changes to the rating system.

So it’s safe to say that, despite Harvard’s recommendations, one or more major studios so far refuses to go along with the R-rating solution backed by 70 percent of U.S. adults.

HOW MUCH DOES DELAY COST?

The R-rating will reduce adolescent exposure to tobacco imagery by about half. This will avert some 60,000 deaths from tobacco annually among smokers recruited as adolescents by smoking in films. That means each month that passes without studio consensus on the R-rating costs 5,000 more tobacco deaths, in the U.S. alone, that might have been prevented by the R-rating.

Of course, in a step equivalent to the R-rating, any studio at any time can announce it will no longer greenlight G/PG/PG-13 films that include smoking (except depictions of the dire health consequences or an actual historical character who smoked). Since no studio has done so, responsibility for continuing to expose young people to lethal tobacco imagery can be said to be shared by *every* studio.

CALCULATING ACCOUNTABILITY

Researchers first presented the compelling evidence that on-screen tobacco imagery is a major recruiter of new young smokers to the MPAA, with Attorneys General present, in late 2005.

If the MPAA had responded appropriately, phasing in an R-rating for tobacco over the next year so as not to disrupt films then in production, the R-rating would have been in place for 30 months by now.

Instead of sharing credit for saving lives, the studios now must share accountability for 5,000 deaths *times* 30 months. So far.

You do the math. We won’t rush you.

WHAT DELAY HAS COST SO FAR: STUDIO SHARES OF FUTURE DEATHS FROM TOBACCO, PREVENTABLE BY R-RATING

[November 2004-April 2007]

STUDIO	DEATHS
Time Warner	35,000
Sony	27,000
Disney	25,500
General Electric	25,000
Viacom	15,800
News Corp.	12,700
Non-MPAA	15,000

Based on each studio’s contribution to tobacco impressions delivered to theatrical audiences 1999-2006. Methods at www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/problem/new_smokers.html

New studio-by-studio data at SmokeFreeMovies.ucsf.edu



* See www.hsph.harvard.edu/mpaa. Smoke Free Movie policies—the R-rating, certification of no payoffs, anti-tobacco spots, and an end to brand display—are endorsed by the World Health Organization, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Heart Association, American Legacy Foundation, American Lung Association, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Society for Adolescent Medicine, Los Angeles County Dept. of Health Services, and others. This project is supported by the Armathea Fund of the Tides Foundation and other donors. To explore this critical health issue, visit our web site or write: Smoke Free Movies, UCSF School of Medicine, San Francisco, CA 94143-1590.