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June 15, 2011

Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies
c/o Ontario Lung Association
573 King Street East
Toronto ON M5A 4L3

Dear Coalition Members:

Re: Board of Health Endorsement of Action on Smoking in Movies

At the May 19, 2011 regular monthly meeting of the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit's Board of Directors the Board considered information put forward and approved the following resolution:

"that Windsor-Essex County Health Unit of Windsor, Ontario endorses the following policies to support the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies in bringing this issue forward to the Ontario Film Review Board (Ministry of Consumer Services) to reduce the exposure of youth to smoking in movies:

- (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 significance.*
- (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 subsidiaries.*

I trust the support of our Board will be brought forward and considered by the Ontario Film Review Board (Ministry of Consumer Services) in an effort to reduce the exposure of youth to smoking in movies and impressions of tobacco.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

G. Allen Heimann, MD, MHSc
Medical Officer of Health and Board Secretary

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Attachment: May 19 Resolution Recommendation
cc: Ontario Boards of Health

Windsor-Essex County Health Unit
Board of Directors

Resolution Recommendation

2011 May 19

ENDORSEMENT OF ACTION ON SMOKING IN MOVIES

BACKGROUND

The history of the tobacco industry's collaboration with Hollywood film producers, including paid product placements, has been well documented. According to one source, "Film is better than any commercial that has been run on television or in any magazine, because the audience is totally unaware of any sponsor involvement."¹

In 1998 US Tobacco companies entered into a legally-binding agreement with state attorney general's that prohibited the paid product placement of tobacco products in entertainment available to young people. Despite signing this "Master Settlement Agreement" smoking depictions actually increased from 1998-2005 in youth rated films. It is estimated that half of all films rated PG-13 and 14A in Canada feature tobacco imagery which raises speculation that their may be some covert planning/payments happening between tobacco and movie executives.²

Researchers have looked at the prevalence of smoking in movies and its impact on youth smoking. The US National Cancer Institute reached the following conclusions:

*"The total weight of the evidence from cross sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies indicates a causal relationship between exposure to smoking in movies and youth smoking initiation."*³

As a result, researchers estimate that 44% of youth smoking can be attributed to on screen smoking exposure.⁴ From a Canadian perspective, 130, 000 Canadians age 15-19 became addicted to tobacco industry products due to exposure to on screen smoking, of which 43, 000 will eventually die of tobacco related illnesses.⁵

As a result, The World Health Organization (WHO) has endorsed four solutions to reduce tobacco depictions in movies:

- 1) **Rate new movies an adult rating**—making any movies that show smoking in a positive way, without giving messages of harm or consequences, or representing a historical figures life, should be given an 18A rating.

¹ Smoke-Free Movies website. <http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/problem/big tobacco.html>. Accessed May 3rd, 2011.

² Physicians for Smoke-Free Canada, Polansky, J.. Tobacco Vector: How American movies, Canadian film subsidies and provincial rating practices will kill 3,000 Canadian teen alive today- and what Canadian government scan do about it. July 2010. www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/2010/Tobaccovector.pdf

³ National Cancer Institute, *Monograph 19: The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, June 2008.

⁴ C Millett and SA Glantz, "Assigning an '18' rating to movies with tobacco imagery is essential to reduce youth smoking (editorial)," *Thorax* 2010; 65(5): 377-78

⁵ Physicians for Smoke-Free Canada, Polansky, J.. Tobacco Vector: How American movies, Canadian film subsidies and provincial rating practices will kill 43,000 Canadian teen alive today- and what Canadian government scan do about it. July 2010. www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/2010/Tobaccovector.pdf

- 2) **Certify no payoffs**—require film producers to indicate that no money, free cigarettes, gifts...etc were used in exchange for exposure in the film.
- 3) **Require strong anti-smoking ads prior to movies depicting tobacco use**—counter marketing where the film is used to deter smoking rather than encourage the behaviour.
- 4) **Stop identifying tobacco brands**—there should be no form of advertising showing tobacco in the movie (i.e. billboards, backgrounds and commercials).

Call for Action

The Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies is calling for health organizations and agencies that work with children and youth to endorse the policies outlined to reduce youth exposure to on-screen smoking and impressions of tobacco. Other actions include writing letters to film board executives, provincial and federal leaders that supports removing smoking in youth movies and discourage funding for movies under an 18A rating with tobacco scenes.

Conclusion

Tobacco use remains the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. Consequently, smoking in movies challenges Ontario's tobacco control efforts. Tobacco imagery in movies, particularly films rated as suitable for children and adolescents, promotes tobacco use and normalizes tobacco products to youth. Therefore, endorsement of the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-free Movies policy actions would help to prevent young people from starting to use tobacco products. Locally, we are organizing several smoke-free movie nights with our community partners throughout the month of May to help raise awareness on the issue of smoking in youth movies.

Therefore be it resolved that Windsor-Essex County Health Unit of Windsor, Ontario endorses the following policies to support the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies in bringing this issue forward to the Ontario Film Review Board (Ministry of Consumer Services) to reduce the exposure of youth to smoking in movies:

- (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.**
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- (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.**