

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

A LONG HISTORY OF EMPTY PROMISES The Cigarette Companies' Ineffective Youth Anti-Smoking Programs

In early December 1998, tobacco giant Philip Morris announced that it was launching a new \$100 million campaign to discourage youth from smoking. It features television advertisements promoting the message "Think. Don't Smoke." Similar "anti-youth-smoking" campaigns and ads by Philip Morris and other cigarette companies have continued since.

Given the urgency of the problem of youth tobacco use, it would seem at first glance that those concerned about the well-being of America's children should welcome these campaigns by Philip Morris and other cigarette companies. But the unfortunate truth is that it is just another in a long line of efforts by the cigarette companies to make themselves appear as if they are seriously addressing the problem of youth smoking. All of these programs have been launched at particularly sensitive political moments for the tobacco industry, and all have been designed more to relieve political pressure on the industry than actually to discourage tobacco use by kids. As detailed below, studies have shown that these past "anti-youth-smoking" efforts by the cigarette companies are flawed and ineffective, and Philip Morris's most recent effort is no exception.

So called "anti-youth-smoking" efforts by Philip Morris or any of the other cigarette companies should be regarded very skeptically, especially by organizations Philip Morris or the others may try to enlist as partners. Philip Morris and the tobacco industry frequently have attempted to recruit mainstream organizations to give their programs, and thus their policies and reputations, a patina of credibility.

If Philip Morris were truly serious about reducing tobacco use by kids, it would greatly reduce and revise, or even eliminate its marketing and advertising practices -- such as the use of the Marlboro Man -- that have been so effective in attracting young smokers. As it stands, Philip Morris and other cigarette companies are promoting its youth smoking programs as an answer to reducing underage tobacco use, while at the same time spending millions every day on marketing efforts that affect kids and fighting real tobacco control programs at local, state and federal levels.

I. Previous Tobacco Industry Youth Smoking Programs Have Been Ineffective

To avoid government regulation, improve their reputation (especially among jurors), and create the public perception that adequate efforts are underway to prevent and reduce youth smoking, the tobacco industry has repeatedly offered voluntary restrictions and programs ostensibly designed to reduce tobacco use:

- In 1964, in response to growing public concern over the dangers of smoking, the industry adopted an Advertising Code that prohibited advertising that suggests smoking is essential to "social prominence, distinction, or sexual attraction." From the rugged Marlboro Cowboy to the fun-loving Newport Couple, the cigarette companies have been regularly violating this code for over three decades.
- In the 1980s, the Tobacco Institute, in response to Congressional interest in restrictions on tobacco ads and the problem of youth smoking, launched several programs, including "Helping Youth Decide" and "Helping Youth Say No." These programs emphasized decision-making for kids rather than warning them of the health dangers of tobacco. A study in the *Journal of Family Practice* found that the "Helping Youth Say No" program could actually encourage youth smoking by its suggestion that tobacco use is an adult activity.¹
- In 1990, the tobacco industry launched a new program called "It's the Law," again in response to Congressional interest in reducing tobacco use among youth. "It's the Law" shifted focus from youth decision-making to providing retailers with educational materials about not selling to kids. Beyond sending decals and signage to retail stores, this program was never effectively implemented. Studies published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in 1992 and 1996 found that compliance with the program was extremely low and it was not effective.² A Philip Morris email document revealed the true purpose of the It's the Law Program by stating:

"We have two objectives for the ITL [It's the Law] program -- 1) To provide an alternative to legislative/mandated policy actions; and 2) To improve PM's image regarding the youth issue."³

- In the later 1990s, to combat growing Congressional interest in the behavior of the tobacco industry, Philip Morris and its allies launched several additional programs, including "We Card" and "Action Against Access." Like previous programs, these were half-efforts at best, a point illustrated in an audit of "Action Against Access" by former U.S. Senator Warren Rudman, who found that retailers did not take the program seriously and that it was not implemented completely. Two years after the program had been in place, Philip Morris had penalized only sixteen out of more than 500,000 tobacco retailers for selling to kids.⁴ More recently, a study found that tobacco product retail stores with "We Card" signs had average youth sales rates roughly equal to those stores with no signs at all, and were significantly more likely to make illegal sales to minors than those retail outlets with government-sponsored signs about no tobacco product sales to youths.⁵

While the industry used these programs to deflect criticism that it was encouraging youth smoking, it opposed virtually all efforts to enact effective policies to protect kids from tobacco. Moreover, it sharpened and expanded its marketing practices, that have been shown to influence children to begin smoking and also to influence brand selection among youth smokers. These are the "replacement smokers" of tomorrow, as they have been called in tobacco industry memos.

II. Internal Industry Documents Show Actual Cigarette Company Motives

Internal tobacco industry documents made public through the various lawsuits against the tobacco companies show that the goal of these industry programs is to deflect political pressure and avoid government regulation rather than actually protect kids:

- A 1973 memo summarizing a meeting of representatives from the major cigarette companies, including Philip Morris and RJ Reynolds, the representative from British American Tobacco (then the parent company to the U.S. Brown & Williamson cigarette company) states "This is one of the proposals we shall initiate to show that we as an industry are doing something about discouraging young people to smoke. This of course is a phony way of showing sincerity as we all well know."⁶
- A 1979 Tobacco Institute memo from then Executive Vice President Franklin Dryden recommended that the industry consider a "pre-adult education" program: "It seems to me our objective is . . . a 'media event' which in itself promises a lot but produces little."⁷
- A 1981 Tobacco Institute memo stated: "In order to offset further erosion of the industry's image in this area, and to avoid further legislative forays, the tobacco industry should take two actions: Clearly and visibly announce our position on teenage smoking to the public generally and to leaders of all youth-oriented organizations [and]. . . A program to depict cigarettes smoking as one of many activities some people choose to do as adults."⁸
- That same 1981 memo shows how tobacco companies seek mainstream partners for these efforts. The Tobacco Institute recommended that the programs be conducted with "major national educational organizations and would be directly supportive of their existing 'responsible living' programs."⁹
- A 1990 Tobacco Institute memo outlined the "Helping Youth Decide" program: "The industry has in the past and must continue to defend its marketing practices. To ensure that the industry is putting forth maximum effort to meet these growing challenges, I have asked Institute staff to identify opportunities to politically and publicly reaffirm the industry's continued commitment to address the issue of youth smoking. . . *In order for this program to achieve its legislative goal*, we believe a multi-year commitment must be made up front." [emphasis added.]¹⁰

- A 1991 R.J. Reynolds memo proposing a company “Youth Non-Smoking Program” stated that such a program would “improve attitudes and opinions of both smokers and nonsmokers toward the industry” and “Reduce support for “youth smoking based” legislation.”¹¹
- In a 1995 memo from Ellen Merlo discussing the composition of the speech for Joseph J. Morgan, then president and CEO of Philip Morris, Merlo confirms that industry was forced to address the youth access issue because they needed to “...find solutions... on the one issue that this industry is most vulnerable on... ” [youth access]. And, in critiquing the content of the draft of the speech, Merlo says, ... “You must put a graph in that this is the right thing to do because it is what the industry believes in.... then get into the restrictions already out there. If we don't seize the initiative the government and the antis will take it away from us...Just do more on the lead and put more in about it being the right thing to do...but it's time to start thinking about ways that we can proactively support legislation, etc.”¹²
- A Philip Morris executive wrote in 1995: “If we can frame proactive legislation or other kinds of action on the Youth Access issue... we will be protecting our industry for decades to come.”¹³

These memos demonstrate that the motivation behind these programs has not been to reduce tobacco use among kids, but rather to gain the industry positive publicity and create the appearance of action. It is therefore not surprising that there is scarce evidence showing the effectiveness of any of the industry's programs.

III. Misleading Alliances With Mainstream Organizations

The tobacco industry has repeatedly reached out to well-respected organizations in an effort to secure credibility for its programs and policies. Most recently, the industry has worked closely with the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce to develop its “JAYS” (Jaycees Against Youth Smoking) program. This program is intended to encourage retailers to enforce minimum-age sales laws and to work with communities to raise awareness of the problem of the illegal sale of tobacco to kids. While these efforts are positive and the Jaycees undoubtedly have the best intentions, this program has done little to reduce smoking because it lacks the key components of effective youth access initiatives, such as mandated retailer-compliance checks using undercover youth buyers.

A hallmark of all industry-designed efforts is the absence of the most effective tools for combating youth tobacco use. The industry seeks collaboration with well-meaning and credible organizations, such as the Jaycees, in an attempt to hide these glaring policy omissions.

IV. The New Philip Morris Program Follows Old Ineffective Patterns

Philip Morris' million-dollar anti-youth-smoking advertising campaign bears the hallmarks of the company's previous failed efforts:

- It is timed to relieve pressure on the industry from encroaching regulation and public action to reduce smoking. More specifically, it is likely that a key motivation is to discourage Congress and state legislatures from earmarking money from the recent tobacco settlement towards hard-hitting counter-advertising campaigns and other measures.
- The program fails to use the tobacco control policies that have been proven to be most effective. Although there is not one single message that works best to discourage kids from using tobacco, the results from Massachusetts and California, which have aggressive counter-advertising campaigns, are instructive. These programs show that the appeals that have the most resonance among youth clearly depict the health consequences of smoking and focus on the industry's marketing and advertising practices. Such messages are conspicuously absent from the Philip Morris ads.
- The industry continues to oppose efforts to protect youth from tobacco and is still impacting kids with its marketing. Approximately 85 percent of youth who smoke choose the three most heavily advertised brands, including nearly 60 percent who smoke Marlboro. Yet, Philip Morris refuses to

end such marketing. If the company was truly serious about ending youth smoking, then it would send the Marlboro Man into retirement. This is precisely what Philip Morris and other tobacco companies agreed to do in the June 20, 1997 agreement with state Attorneys General: eliminate all human and cartoon characters from their marketing. Later, the tobacco industry opposed and helped defeat the McCain bill, which would have ratified the agreement. Thus, it was never implemented.

- The industry continues to spend far more on advertising and marketing that attracts kids than on its youth anti-smoking program. The companies spent more than \$12.4 billion in 2002 to market and promote their cigarettes.¹⁴ Although Philip Morris' \$100 million youth campaign is a substantial amount of money, even if it paid for an effective program, the messages would be drowned out by images of the Marlboro Man in venues ranging from convenience stores to magazines read heavily by kids.
- Philip Morris benefits from TV exposure. Since the early 1970s, tobacco companies have not been on television, except for a joint campaign in 1998 to oppose Congressional action against tobacco. Now, with the only national anti-tobacco campaign on TV by any organization – government, corporate or non-profit – Philip Morris stands to gain exposure and potentially an enhanced reputation, despite the generally low regard in which the public holds cigarette companies.

Advertising critics also have chastised Philip Morris anti-youth-smoking ads:

- *ADWEEK* columnist Barbara Lippert wrote: "[T]hese ads are too tepid and generic — they could sell anything from orange juice to toothpaste. . . PM has chosen to create a mellow, sensitive, 'rely on your good sense, son' picture. Are they serious? This is advertising covering a life-and-death issue! So where is the big stick? The scare tactics? The hit 'em over your head with destroying life stuff?"¹⁵
- *USA Today* advertising columnist Bruce Horowitz placed Philip Morris' new campaign on his "Worst Ads of 1998" list. He wrote: "This is Philip Morris' jaded attempt at PR. Three spots with kids who say smoking isn't cool. . . . Philip Morris says it wants kids to stop smoking. Right. Just like Bill Gates wants kids to stop staring at computer screens."¹⁶
- Fred Goldberg, chairman-CEO of Goldberg Moser O'Neill, an advertising agency in San Francisco, wrote in *Advertising Age*: "I call it unmitigated gall and hypocrisy; incredible and disheartening. It is another reflection of the distorted values and warped standards that exist today more than ever."¹⁷

Studies show that Philip Morris's anti-smoking ads are less effective than other anti-smoking ads.

A March 1999 study by Teenage Research Unlimited found that Philip Morris' anti-youth-smoking ads were less effective than those already being used in California, Massachusetts, Arizona and Florida in their statewide tobacco prevention programs.¹⁸ More specifically, the study found that:

- > Ads that graphically, dramatically, and emotionally portray the serious negative consequences of smoking were consistently rated highest by respondents in terms of making them "stop and think about not using tobacco." But the Philip Morris ads said little or nothing about negative health consequences from smoking.
- > Ads that focused on the "choice" theme (i.e., be yourself, you can choose whether to smoke), such as those run by Philip Morris, were consistently rated lowest.

Similarly, a June 2002 study found that the Truth Campaign anti-youth-smoking ads of the Legacy Foundation were more effective at reaching and influencing youth than the Philip Morris ads.¹⁹

V. Conclusion: Philip Morris (and the Rest of the Cigarette Companies) Have Not Taken Effective Steps to Reduce Youth Smoking.

While Philip Morris and the other cigarette companies divert attention to their new “anti-youth-smoking” initiatives and other public relations efforts, they are spending more than \$12.4 billion per year (or about \$34 million every day) to promote and market their deadly products. If Philip Morris honestly wanted to reduce youth smoking, it would immediately do the following:

- Stop marketing its tobacco products in ways that reach and influence kids.
- Quit using the Marlboro Man, the most recognized and effective cigarette icon, in its advertising.
- Implement all the marketing restrictions it agreed to in the June, 1997 Attorneys General settlement, including:
 - > a ban on vending machines and on all self-service displays for cigarettes;
 - > a ban on tobacco internet advertising;
 - > make all tobacco ads in magazines with significant youth audiences black-and-white text only;
 - > a ban on outdoor ads at retail outlets;
 - > a complete ban on all brand name sponsorships of teams, sports, entertainment, etc;
 - > stronger and more visible warning labels on all tobacco packaging and ads; and
 - > a limit of two small tobacco ads in black-and-white text only at each retail outlet.
- Stop opposing cigarette tax increases and other effective policies to prevent and reduce youth smoking.

The Philip Morris anti-youth-smoking campaign, like the company’s previous efforts, does none of the above and should be seen for what it really is – a paper tiger. It is not likely to be effective, and it certainly does not reduce the need for aggressive state and federal counter-advertising campaigns, new restrictions on tobacco marketing that reaches and influences kids, and new comprehensive programs to reduce tobacco use among kids

It would be unfortunate if credible organizations partner with Philip Morris and attach their names and reputations to this program, which may help enhance the company's image with certain members of Congress, with stockholders and perhaps with some of the public, including children. The Philip Morris anti-youth-smoking campaign most likely will have met its corporate goal if it succeeds in diverting or stopping truly serious efforts to reduce tobacco use among kids.

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Additional Information

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids Fact Sheets, available at www.tobaccofreekids.org

- *Tobacco Industry Marketing to Kids*
- *Tobacco Industry Interference With State Efforts to Prevent and Reduce Tobacco Use*
- *The Cigarette Companies Cannot Survive Unless Kids Smoke*
- *Philip Morris -- A History of Double Talk.*

Kirshenbaum, M., et al., *Smoke & Mirrors: How the Tobacco Industry Buys and Lies Its Way to Power and Profits*, an Advocacy Institute report (August 1998), 202-659-8475 or info@advocacy.org.

¹ DiFranza, J.R. & T. McAfee, "The Tobacco Institute: Helping Youth Say "Yes" to Tobacco," *Journal of Family Practice* 34(6):694-6 (June 1992).

² DiFranza, J.R. & L.J. Brown, "The Tobacco Institute's "It's the Law" Campaign: Has It Halted Illegal Sales of Tobacco to Children," *American Journal of Public Health* 82(9): 1271-73 (September 1992); DiFranza, J.R., et al., "Youth Access to Tobacco: The Effects of Age, Gender, and "It's the Law" Programs," *American Journal of Public Health* 86(2): 221-24 (February 1996). See, also, DiFranza, J.R. & W.T. Godshall, "Tobacco Industry Efforts Hindering Enforcement of the Ban on Tobacco Sales to Minors: Actions Speak Louder than Words," *Tobacco Control* 5(2): 127-31 (Summer 1996).

- ³ Crawford, D., email to Slavitt, J., "RE: Sting Operations," May 9, 1994, Philip Morris Bates Number 2023587951, <http://www.pmdocs.com/getallimg.asp?if=avpidx&DOCID=2023587951>.
- ⁴ Kirshenbaum, M., et al., *Smoke & Mirrors: How the Tobacco Industry Buys and Lies Its Way to Power and Profits*, an Advocacy Institute report (August 1998), 202-659-8475 or info@advocacy.org.
- ⁵ Cowling, D & D Robbins, "Rates of Illegal Tobacco Sales to Minors Varies by Sign Type in California," Research Letter, *American Journal of Public Health*, 90(11): 1792-93, November 2000.
- ⁶ Hung, S., Smoking and Health Meeting, February 14, 1973, Philip Morris Bates No. 2024950089/98, <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/owq24e00>.
- ⁷ Tobacco Institute memo from Frank Dryden to Bill Kloepfer titled, "August 1 'Pre-Adult Education' Memo," (August 8, 1979). Tobacco Institute Bates Number: TIMN0065288.
- ⁸ Tobacco Institute report, "The Development of Tobacco Industry Strategy" (1981), Philip Morris Bates Number: 2024956653/6698.
- ⁹ Tobacco Institute report, "The Development of Tobacco Industry Strategy" (1981), Philip Morris Bates Number: 2024956653/6698.
- ¹⁰ Untitled memo from Tobacco Institute president Samuel D. Chilcote Jr to the executive committee (1990), Tobacco Institute Bates Number: TIMN0021071/1075.
- ¹¹ R.J. Reynolds document, "R.J. Reynolds ' Youth Non-Smoking Program," **Bates No.** 507746564/6567, 1991, <http://tobaccodocuments.org/landman/507746564-6567.pdf>.
- ¹² Ellen Merlo, Philip Morris memo, "JJM Speech" (February 9, 1995), Philip Morris Bates Number: 2044046016.
- ¹³ 6-page draft Philip Morris speech, "Jjm to Pm Invitational Importance of Youth Issue" (Feb 10, 1995), PM Bates number: 2044046017/6022
- ¹⁴ Federal Trade Commission, *Cigarette Report for 2002, 2004* [data for top six manufacturers only], <http://www.ftc.gov/reports/cigarette/041022cigaretterpt.pdf>. More recent data is not yet available, but cigarette marketing has likely grown since 2002. See, e.g., <http://tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0128.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ Lippert, Barbara. "Smoke and Mirrors," *ADWEEK Eastern Edition* 39(50): 34 (December 14, 1998).
- ¹⁶ Horovitz, Bruce "Ad Experts' Best & Worst of 1998 Bug spots rock; Philip Morris' ads blow smoke," *USA Today*, B3 (December 21, 1998).
- ¹⁷ Goldberg, Fred. "Is PM Blowing Smoke in Anti-Tobacco Ads? Looking Behind Philip Morris' \$100M Campaign, Ad Agency CEO Sees Hypocrisy," *Advertising Age* (January 18, 1999).
- ¹⁸ Teenage Research Unlimited, *Counter-Tobacco Advertising Exploratory Summary Report January – March, 1999* (March 1999)
- ¹⁹ American Legacy Foundation. "Getting to the Truth: Assessing Youths' Reactions to the truthsm and "Think. Don't Smoke" Tobacco Countermarketing Campaigns", First Look report 9, June 2002, <http://www.americanlegacy.org>.