

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids[®]

THE CIGARETTE COMPANIES CANNOT SURVIVE UNLESS KIDS SMOKE

The big cigarette companies have recently initiated a massive new public relations campaign to persuade government policymakers and the public that they have turned over a new leaf and are now responsible corporate citizens. Central to this effort is the cigarette companies' claim that they do not market to kids, are working hard to reduce underage smoking and have no interest in the youth market. But they are lying.

No matter what the cigarette companies say or do, they cannot stay in business unless kids smoke. As the companies know, the vast majority of all smokers begin their addictive habit before they reach 18, the legal age for buying cigarettes – and almost nobody tries smoking for the first time after 18.* In other words, if large numbers of kids did not try smoking, become regular users, and turn into addicted adult smokers, the big cigarette companies would eventually not have enough adult customers to make staying in business worthwhile.

In addition, smokers develop strong brand preferences and loyalty during their childhood years, as most adults continue to smoke the brands they used as kids. Accordingly, it is not only important to the major cigarette companies that large numbers of children smoke but that the underage smokers choose their brands – and that cannot happen unless kids are exposed to the cigarette companies' brand advertising and other promotional efforts. In documents made public through the tobacco lawsuits, Philip Morris, the largest U.S. cigarette company, acknowledged the critical role underage smokers play in its success:

"Today's teenager is tomorrow's potential regular customer, and the overwhelming majority of smokers first begin to smoke while in their teens . . . it is during the teenage years that the initial brand choice is made...the success of Marlboro Red during its most rapid growth period was because it became the brand of choice among teenagers who then stuck with it as they grew older." [Philip Morris, "Special Report," March 31, 1981, Philip Morris Document #1000390803/55]

"The ability to attract new smokers and develop them into a young adult franchise is key to brand development." [Philip Morris, *Five-Year Trends 1988-1992*, PM Doc. #2044895379/484]

Despite their inescapable reliance on youth smoking, the cigarette companies now claim that they have stopped marketing to kids. But their actions contradict their words. They are well aware, for example, that their new efforts to target college-aged youths will appeal to underage audiences, as well. The cigarette companies also continue to advertise extensively in magazines with large numbers of young readers even though they could easily reach adult smokers through ads in other publications with fewer underage readers. Similarly, the companies continue to oppose a range of measures that would make it harder for kids to get cigarettes while barely inconveniencing adult smokers – such as proposals to stop vending machine sales, to require that cigarettes be kept behind the counter at stores, or to restrict tobacco product sales by mail or over the Internet.

Given this two-faced behavior, the cigarette companies' current "anti-youth-smoking" initiatives should be seen for what they are: yet another round of public relations efforts designed to improve the industry's image and help to forestall any new government efforts to prevent tobacco use.

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* See, e.g., *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People: A Report of The Surgeon General* (1994); National Institutes of Health, *National Survey Results on Drug Use from the Monitoring the Future Study, 1975-1997* (1998) [peak years for initiation of smoking from age 11 to 12 (6th and 7th grades), with regular smoking developing in 8th to 11th grade].