

SUMMARY TESTIMONY OF STANTON GLANTZ  
May 11, 2004, before the Senate Commerce Committee

There is exceptionally strong scientific evidence that, even after accounting for other factors, smoking in the movies stimulates adolescents to smoke. Indeed, smoking in the movies is a more powerful promoter of smoking than traditional cigarette advertising. Most important, like a drug, there is a “dose-response effect;” the more smoking in movies kids see the more likely they are to start smoking. Smoking in the movies can neutralize the effects of nonsmoking parents as role models.

Apologists for the studios like to say that smoking in the movies just reflects real life. This is not true. Since 1950 the percentage of Americans who smoke has been cut in half, yet smoking in the movies is increasing. After falling from 1950 to about 1989, smoking in the movies increased dramatically and now exceeds 1950 levels. Moreover, since 2002 smoking in the movies has shifted from adult rated R movies into youth rated movies, particularly PG-13. Between 1999 and 2003, fully 80% of PG-13 movies included smoking. Over that same period, American movies delivered over 8 billion smoking impressions to 6-17 year olds in the United States in theaters and uncounted billions of more impressions via television and video release.

This exposure to smoking has an effect. Based on the results of the Dartmouth study, we have estimated that 390,000 kids start smoking every year because of smoking in the movies, enough to replace almost every smoker that the tobacco industry kills each year. Time-Warner alone delivered 100,000 kids to the tobacco industry, followed by Disney at 60,000.

There has been a great deal of concern over why there is so much – and increasing – smoking in movies, particularly youth-rated movies. We know that in the past Big Tobacco paid off Hollywood. We know that the payoffs were at all levels, from deals with studios to free cigarettes for actors and directors. We know that everyone denied the payoffs, including in 1989 hearings before Congress. And we know, from the secret industry documents that they lied about it.

We know that Big Tobacco told Congress they would stop the payoffs in 1989. And we know, again from the documents, that inducements to get smoking into movies continued at least through the mid-1990s.

Today, as in the past, we hear everyone denying that any money or other favors are changing hands. And, despite searching for the money, no one has been able to prove that it is there.

There are, however, three things that we do know:

1. Both the tobacco and motion picture industries are exceptionally talented at hiding money.
2. There is more smoking in the movies than ever.
3. It really does not matter if anyone is getting paid off. If Hollywood is getting money to deliver 390,000 kids a year to the tobacco industry they are corrupt; if they are doing it for free, they are stupid.

The real goal needs to be to solve the problem by reducing the dose of smoking in movies delivered in movies produced for and marketed to kids.

That is why I have suggested four simple steps to reduce the dose of smoking in movies that kids see:

- Rate smoking movies “R.” This simple amendment to the studios’ existing voluntary ratings system would cut dose – and new tobacco addicts – by about 60% immediately and at no cost. All we are asking the studios to do is treat smoking as seriously as they treat the f-word.
- Certify no payoffs.
- End brand identification.
- Run free anti-smoking ads before smoking films

These policies, particularly the R rating, could be implemented by the motion picture industry within its current practices and without requiring government action.

Unfortunately, the people in Hollywood working with me on this effort are convinced that the studios will not solve this problem until Congress – or perhaps an enterprising or lucky Attorney General who finds the money – forces them to solve it. I hope that it does not come to that.

Cigarettes don’t sell movie tickets. The First Amendment freedom of creative expression is not being impinged. Nobody in Hollywood is making any money off this, they claim. So why is the studio association digging in its heels? *What’s behind the curtain, besides the tobacco industry?* Because I don’t see anything here worth defending. Let alone anything worth incurring the wrath and suspicion of every American parent. Let alone worth 390,000 addicted kids a year.