



TOBACCO COMPANIES CANNOT SURVIVE UNLESS KIDS SMOKE

The big tobacco companies have initiated massive public relations campaigns 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 are the tobacco companies' claims 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 tobacco 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 age 18, and almost nobody tries smoking for the first time after 18.¹ In other words, if large numbers of kids did not try smoking and go on to become regular users, the tobacco companies eventually would not have enough adult customers to make staying in business worthwhile.

In addition, smokers develop strong brand preferences and loyalty during their childhood years; and most adults continue to smoke the brands they used as kids. Therefore, it is not only important to tobacco companies that large numbers of children smoke but also that the underage smokers choose their brands—and that cannot happen unless kids are exposed to the tobacco companies' brand advertising and promotional efforts. In documents made public through the tobacco lawsuits, Philip Morris USA, 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." [Johnston, ME, *Young Smokers Prevalence, Trends, Implications and Related Demographic Trends*, PM USA Research Center, March 31, 1981, Bates No. 2077864711-4712]

"The ability to attract new smokers and develop them into a young adult franchise is key to brand development." [Philip Morris International Marketing Research, *Worldwide Marlboro Monitor: Five-Year Trends 1988-1992*, Bates No. 2044895379-2044895484]

In the U.S. government's landmark case against the tobacco companies, U.S. District Judge Gladys Kessler found that Philip Morris and other tobacco manufacturers engaged in a decades long scheme to get young people to start smoking and to continue smoking. According to Judge Kessler, "From the 1950s to the Present, Different Defendants, at Different Times and Using Different Methods, Have Intentionally Marketed to Young People Under the Age of Twenty-One in Order to Recruit "Replacement Smokers" to Ensure the Economic Future of the Tobacco Industry."²

Despite their inescapable reliance on youth smoking, the tobacco companies continue to claim that they do not market to kids, but their actions contradict their words. They are well aware, for example, that any efforts to target college-aged youths will appeal to underage audiences, as well. Moreover, although some tobacco companies have stopped advertising their tobacco products in magazines, others have not. As a result, tobacco advertisements still can be found in many magazines with large numbers of young readers.

The 2012 Surgeon General Report provides strong evidence that counters the industry's claims that it does not market to kids. Among its major findings is the conclusion that the advertising and promotional activities of the tobacco companies cause the onset and continuation of smoking among adolescents and young adults.³ The 2014 Surgeon General Report expands on this finding, stating, "...the root cause of the smoking epidemic is also evident: the tobacco industry aggressively markets and promotes lethal and addictive products, and continues to recruit youth and young adults as new consumers of these products."⁴

While tobacco companies claim that they want to prevent youth from starting to use tobacco products, they continue to oppose the evidenced-based policies that work to shield youth from a lifetime of tobacco

addiction: increased tobacco taxes, comprehensive smoke-free laws, and sustained funding for comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation programs. For example, in 2012, the nation's two largest tobacco companies, Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds, funded a \$47 million ad campaign to defeat a California ballot initiative (Proposition 29) to increase the state cigarette tax by \$1 per pack. Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds opposed Proposition 29 because they know that increasing the cigarette tax is one of the most effective ways to reduce smoking, especially among kids.

Given this two-faced behavior, the tobacco 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 real efforts to prevent tobacco use.⁵

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Additional Campaign Factsheets on Tobacco Company Marketing to Kids are available at http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/fact_sheets/toll/tobacco_kids/marketing/.

¹ SAMHSA, HHS, 2011 National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health, <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm>; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults, A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2012 <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobaccouse/index.html>.

² *U.S. V. Philip Morris USA, Inc., et al.*, No. 99-CV-02496GK (U.S. Dist. Ct., D.C.), Final Opinion, August 17, 2006, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/reports/doj/FinalOpinion.pdf>.

³ HHS, *Prevention Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2012, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2012/index.htm.

⁴ HHS, *The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2014, <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/>.

⁵ See also, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids factsheet, *Big Surprise: Tobacco Company Prevention Campaigns Don't Work; Maybe It's Because They Are Not Supposed To*, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0302.pdf>.