

What is Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! ?

"Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down!" is a project of the American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails that is designed to raise awareness about the impact of tobacco use in the movies on young people. The project is made possible by a grant received from the Tobacco Health Protection Act of 1988, Proposition 99.

Why is tobacco use in the movies an issue?

The debate over tobacco use in the movies is driven by the concern over how such use impacts young people. While major strides have been made in reducing tobacco use among adults, success with youth has been disappointingly slim. In fact, in California there has been a significant increase of tobacco use among teenagers. According to figures from the California Department of Health Services, tobacco use has increased from 9 to 11% since 1993 among the teen population.

The **Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down!** project believes that the entertainment industry can play a significant role in influencing young people in terms of tobacco use... both positively and negatively. When an actor or actress lights up or objects to tobacco use on screen, millions of young people in theaters across the nation and around the world receive the message. Modern video technology and cable television help assure this message can be repeated decades into the future, time and time again. It is a powerful type of behavioral and attitudinal motivation, because it is in a dramatic context.

What does this project hope to accomplish?

The overall goal of the **Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down!** project is to reduce the negative influence that tobacco use in the movies has on young people. There are two ways this project is designed to help accomplish this goal. The first is to increase awareness among young people so they are in a sense inoculated against pro-tobacco messages by becoming more critical viewers. The second is to increase the awareness within the entertainment industry about the issue and hopefully encourage its creators and performers to reconsider creative choices regarding tobacco use in future productions.

Who Reviews the Movies?

Young people between the ages of 14-22 are recruited and trained to utilize a standardized form for analyzing tobacco content in movies. Reviewers are then assigned specific movies for analysis. The amount and type of tobacco use depicted, the demographics of who is using tobacco and any perceived messages about tobacco use are included in each review. All movies are reviewed by a team of 2-3 youth and adults. Movies with conflicting reviews or high counts of tobacco are assigned for another review when the movie is released on DVD. Data gathered is then summarized and released to the public through the media, on the Lung Association's web site and at selected conferences. The information is also provided to key entertainment industry people.

Major Accomplishments

The Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! project has compiled the largest database of its kind on tobacco content in movies. It has been used repeatedly for university research and is utilized by advocates around the work.

"Tobacco Use in Popular Movies During the Past Decade", a report co-authored with researchers at the University of California at Los Angeles is due to be released at the end of the year in *Tobacco Control*, a quarterly scientific journal published by the British Medical Journal. The report will recap 10 years of Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! data and findings.

"How the Tobacco Industry Built Its Relationship with Hollywood" a report co-authored by Curtis Mekemson, lead consultant on the TUTD project and a longtime affiliate with the ALA-Sacramento-Emigrant Trails was released in March 2002 in *Tobacco Control*, a quarterly scientific journal published by the British Medical Journal. The report received incredible media coverage throughout the world. It was featured on CNN, the New York Times, Time Magazine and on shows such as The View, and Inside Edition.

The World Health Organization adapted the Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! criteria to conduct a study on Bollywood in India, the largest motion picture industry in the world.

Two slides containing an anti-tobacco message appeared on 3,500 movie theater screens throughout California in the summer of 2000, in an effort to inoculate young people against pro-tobacco messages in movies. Cooperating with MPAA and NATO, the slide ran in movie theaters throughout the summer, and in some theaters, throughout the year.