

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

DATE: 2015 January 15

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**THE HEALTH UNIT AND *ONE LIFE ONE YOU* TAKE ACTION AGAINST  
SMOKING IN MOVIES**

***Recommendation***

*It is recommended that:*

- 1. The Board of Health endorse Report No. 003-15 re: The Health Unit and One Life One You Take Action Against Smoking in Movies; and further*
- 2. The Board of Health send a letter to Landmark Cinemas, along with a copy of the Board of Health Endorsement of Action on Smoking in Movies (attached as Appendix A to Report No. 003-15), to express its disappointment in the decision not to run the smoke-free movie public service announcement, and to request a further opportunity to provide the facts about the impact that tobacco imagery in movies has on youth initiation of tobacco use.*

**Key Points**

- The more youth see smoking in movies, the more likely they are to start smoking.
- Since 2011, the Middlesex London Board of Health has been a strong proponent for taking action on smoking in movies, endorsing the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-free Movies' policies to reduce the exposure of youth to smoking in movies.
- *One Life One You* have been spear-heading the Health Unit's smoke-free movies initiative
- In December, Landmark Cinemas refused to approve the content of a smoke-free movie public service announcement since the advertisement takes a strong stance on no smoking in youth-g geared movies and would be seen as contradictory to their business interests.

**Background**

The evidence is conclusive that viewing smoking in movies leads to youth starting to smoke. The more youth see smoking in movies, the more likely they are to start. Not only does exposure to onscreen tobacco imagery increase smoking initiation and progression to regular smoking among youth, it also undermines tobacco prevention efforts by making tobacco use seem more acceptable.

The Ontario Tobacco Research Unit conducted a study in 2014 to examine the extent of onscreen tobacco exposure in movies among Ontario youth. In their report entitled, [Exposure to Onscreen Tobacco in Movies among Ontario Youth, 2004-2013](#), they found that 86% of movies released from 2004 – 2013 that contained tobacco images were youth-rated in Ontario. They estimated that, on average, roughly 13,200 current smokers in Ontario aged 12-17 were recruited to smoking in a year because of watching smoking in movies. Approximately 4,200 of these young smokers will die prematurely as a result.

Since 2011, the Middlesex-London Board of Health has been a strong proponent for taking action on smoking in movies, endorsing the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies' policies to reduce youth exposure, attached as [Appendix A](#).

## 2014 Smoke-Free Movies Initiative

In partnership with members of the Southwest Tobacco Control Area Network (SWTCAN), [One Life One You](#) and the Health Unit participated in a number of initiatives to promote three key strategies for parents:

1. ***Be in the Know*** - Monitor movie contents and prevent your children from watching movies that contain tobacco use.
2. ***Talk it Out*** - Talk to your kids about the smoking and tobacco use they see in movies to help reduce or eliminate the influence that tobacco imagery has on children and decisions about tobacco use.
3. ***Take Action*** –Tell others about the harms of smoking in movies and sign the global petition to eliminate smoking in youth friendly movies available through the [Health Unit website](#).

The flagship event for the 2014 Smoke-Free Movies initiative was the outdoor Smoke-Free Movie Night in Victoria Park, organized and implemented by members of *One Life One You* in partnership with the Canadian Cancer Society, the City of London, and the YMCA of Western Ontario, along with the help of close to 50 youth volunteers from across Middlesex-London. Well over 2,000 children and parents attended the free, outdoor event, participating in five interactive tobacco prevention and education stations before enjoying an outdoor screening of the feature smoke-free movie, Disney's Frozen. Nearly 300 parent surveys were completed to gauge parental understanding of the issue and to inform future planning, and an Infographic targeted to parents, attached as [Appendix B](#), was disseminated.

## Cinema Advertisements Advocate for Action Against Smoking in Movies

A public service announcement educating movie-goers on the impact of smoking in movies on tobacco use and encouraging people to sign the online petition ran from December 19<sup>th</sup> to January 1<sup>st</sup> in both Cineplex-operated movie theatres and Rainbow Cinemas within London. Landmark Cinemas, the owner and operator of the Empire Movie Theatre, refused to approve the content of the public service announcement stating “[t]he content of the spot is a strong stance on no smoking in youth-gearred movies, and would be seen as contradictory to product currently running on screen and may negatively impact guest perception of Landmark’s movie offerings.”

In addition to providing information to movie-goers regarding the pervasive impact that tobacco imagery in movies has on tobacco initiation in youth and how to take action, the World Health Organization recommends strong anti-smoking ads appear before films that include tobacco imagery to inoculate both younger and older adolescents against the promotional effects of exposure to tobacco images.

Landmark Cinemas Canada is the second largest motion picture theatre exhibition company in Canada, operating 48 theatres with 331 screens. Their decision not to place the advertisement could impact educational efforts locally, provincially and nationally. This challenge provides the Health Unit, in collaboration with the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies, with an opportunity to reach out to the company to provide information and education regarding the influential role of smoking in movies.

This report was prepared by Ms. Tanya Verhaeghe, Health Promoter and Youth Engagement Coordinator, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team.



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<p><b>This report addresses</b> the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards (2014): Foundations: Principles 1, 2 &amp; 4; Chronic Disease Prevention: 1, 7, 11 &amp; 12</p>
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