



## Youth Exposure to Tobacco Marketing

September 28, 2012

# NYPIRG POSITION PAPER

[www.nypirg.org/health](http://www.nypirg.org/health)

### Background:

- 90% of adult smokers start before the age of 18<sup>i</sup>
- Big Tobacco targets our youth by marketing to them
- The more tobacco ads kids see, the more likely they are to smoke

### Evidence-Based Solutions:

- Decrease the visibility of tobacco marketing in stores
- Limit the sale of tobacco products around schools
- Eliminate the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies

## Good for Big Tobacco, Bad for Our Communities

Youth smoking rates are of particular interest to Big Tobacco's bottom line. As the industry's "replacement" clientele, the youth demographic needs to be tapped in order for the industry to remain profitable by replacing smokers that die or quit. But, what's good for the business is bad for the health of our communities. Almost twenty thousand public high-school students living in NYC currently smoke<sup>ii</sup> and one-third of them will die prematurely because of the addictive habit.<sup>iii</sup> Tobacco marketing, pushed on communities by the tobacco industry, is a top contributor to youth smoking rates. As a student-directed organization concerned about public health and corporate responsibility, combating the effects of tobacco marketing on youth is a priority for the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG). NYPIRG supports taking proactive steps to protect young persons from exposure to tobacco marketing.

NYPIRG has been pressing for New York to become a national leader in health since our beginnings. We played a prominent role in the fight for New York State to protect children and workers from exposure to tobacco smoke, advocated for programs designed to reduce underage smoking, and effectively pushed for legislation to ensure that cigarettes sold in New York meet strong fire-safety standards. More recently, NYPIRG worked with the *NYC Coalition for a Smoke-Free City* on a successful campaign for smoke-free public parks and beaches in New York City, and our partnership continues in our efforts to reduce youth smoking rates.

Young people start smoking because of constant and appealing tobacco marketing. According to the 2012 U.S. Surgeon General's report, *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults*, scientific evidence "consistently and coherently points to the intentional marketing of tobacco products to youth as being a cause of young people's tobacco use."

Tobacco advertisements and products are designed to appeal to children and teenagers. The advertisements are colorful allusions to pleasure and an escape from stress that feature young, fun-loving and attractive smokers. Tobacco products mimic the colors and shapes of gum, mints, and other candies popular with children. Take Camel for example: Snus, Orbs, and Strips are three Camel products that can be easily mistaken for mints and gum. The products' packages and the smokeless tobacco products themselves are similar to TicTacs®, Altoids®, and mouthwash strips. What's more, the images that companies use change to keep up with candy package trends.

Tobacco advertisements and products are strategically placed to maximize youth exposure. Since new federal regulations restrict TV and print advertising, big tobacco promotion has moved into convenience stores to reach youth. Tobacco companies incentivize stores to place their ads and products in strategic locations. Many times, marketing ends up at a child's eye-level or near other desirable items like candy and toys. NYPIRG supports reducing the visibility of tobacco marketing in stores.

Since young people are twice as likely as adults to recall tobacco advertising,<sup>iv</sup> it's unsurprising that their marketing strategy does not end there. Tobacco companies target stores located near schools. According to the medical journal, *Preventive Medicine*, marketing is more prevalent in stores where teens frequently shop.<sup>v</sup> In New York City, NYPIRG joined the American Lung Association, the Manhattan Smoke-Free Partnership, and dozens of youth, to tour the neighborhood around Emma Lazarus High School (ELHS) in Chinatown. Six stores within a two block radius of the school displayed at least one tobacco advertisement that was plainly visible to ELHS students passing to and from school each day, including one directly across the street from the school entrance. Many of the stores displayed multiple ads. NYPIRG supports removing tobacco products and advertisements from locations near schools.

Pharmacies are one of the last places where you would think Big Tobacco could effectively reach youth. However, today you can find large power walls of tobacco products for sale in your local chain pharmacy, sending a mixed message to customers. Pharmacies market themselves as health and wellness centers, yet they sell products that lead to asthma, cancer, and lung and pulmonary diseases. Pharmacies should promote health, not death and disease. NYPIRG supports eliminating tobacco product sales in chain pharmacies.

Big Tobacco targets those who they hope will be their future customer base with calculated and manipulative marketing tricks. To reduce smoking rates, we must take Big Tobacco's target off of young people's backs. NYPIRG supports the protection of youth from exposure to tobacco marketing by decreasing the visibility of marketing in stores, by limiting the sale of tobacco products around schools, and by eliminating the sale of tobacco products in chain pharmacies.

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<sup>i</sup> 5US Department of Health and Human Services. "Youth and Tobacco: Preventing Tobacco Use among Young People" A Report of the Surgeon General." 1995.

<sup>ii</sup> New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. "New York City Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2011".

<sup>iii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Projected Smoking-Related Deaths Among Youth -- United States." MMWR 45(44). 1996.

<sup>iv</sup> International Communications Research. "National Telephone Survey of Teens Aged 12 to 17." 2007.

<sup>v</sup> Henriksen. L. et al. "Is adolescent smoking related to the density and proximity of tobacco outlets and retail cigarette advertising near schools?" *Preventive Medicine* 47. 2008.