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A 1995 survey released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the percentage of high school students who admitted smoking at least one cigarette in the 30 days prior to the survey had climbed from 27.5 to 34.8 since 1991. (Photograph by Laura Kleinhenz)

THICKER SMOKE

Despite the education, student smoking increases

By Michael Kelley

The Commercial Appeal

The coffee is strong, the atmosphere Bohemian, the air perfumed with the smoke of a few dozen cigarettes.

At The Edge, a Cooper Street coffeehouse, a crowd of teens and twentysomethings is waiting for the band to start playing, or peering over a hand of cards, or head-to-head with their friends in intense conversation.

Patrick Brown, a 15-year-old high school sophomore and restaurant worker, steps out onto the deck to watch an evening storm roll in from the west. He leans against a wooden railing and fires up another Marlboro.

"I've tried to quit twice," says Patrick. He demonstrates what happened by holding his hands in front of him and affecting a slight palsy.

Patrick says he started smoking while riding around with a group of friends last Thanksgiving and quickly developed a pack-and-a-half per day habit. He doesn't want to quit anymore, not right now anyway.

"I like smoking," he says. "I wish I didn't, but I enjoy it, really. I don't plan to keep smoking forever. Of course, I know that's what everybody else says."

For now, Patrick feels at home among a legion of teenage cigarette smokers that keeps growing despite the efforts of health educators, worried mothers and fathers and the Clinton administration, whose anti-smoking campaign hasn't caught on just yet.

A 1995 survey released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the percentage of high school students who admitted smoking at least one cigarette in the 30 days prior to the survey had climbed from 27.5 to 34.8 since 1991. In a University of Michigan survey last year, daily smokers among high school seniors across the United States had risen from 17.2 percent to 22.2 percent since 1992.

The new crop of young smokers cuts across all sorts of cliques and classes and demographic groups.

Young white suburban smokers wait until Mom's red Mustang pulls off the lot at Trinity Commons in Cordova, then quickly burn one before rushing in to see a movie.

Chances are that movie will have a smoking scene. Something like Julia Roberts enjoying a relaxing cigarette break during her stressful journey in *My Best Friend's Wedding* or Jeff Goldblum firing up a stogie in *Independence Day* and declaring, "I could get used to this."

There are new smokers, lots of them, among African-American youths as well, particularly boys. Among male black high school students asked in surveys if they've had at least one cigarette in the last 30 days, those who answered yes leaped from 14.1 percent to 27.8 percent between 1991 and 1995. In the high school seniors poll, daily smokers had jumped from 3.7 to 7 percent.

"It cuts across all kinds of boundaries between the social groups. It just encompasses everyone," said Jessica Hartz, 17, who graduated from Germantown High School this spring.

Hartz said it seemed that almost 50 percent of her high school classmates smoked. She hasn't taken up the habit and is baffled by how many of her peers have started. "I don't understand it because we have so much research now showing how bad it is for you," she said.

Among the very young new smokers, "I guess it's ignorance," said Fairview Junior High ninth-grader Latasha Mister, 14. "They don't know the impact it's going to have on their bodies until it's too late. They don't realize what's really happening."

Teenagers say they aren't influenced by advertising or the not-so-subtle pro-smoking messages in the movies these days. They say they pick up the habit from friends.

Robert Klesges isn't so sure about that. He's a psychology professor and director of the University of Memphis Prevention Center, a research laboratory established with the goal of controlling cancer and cardiovascular disease.

"Girls had a much lower onset (they were younger when they started smoking) than boys until the late '70s, when overnight there was a huge increase in girls smoking, coinciding with when Virginia Slims were introduced," Klesges said.

"They had a higher rate than boys until the late '80s, when there was a big blip in boys, which coincided with the introduction of Joe Camel," Klesges continued. "When cigarette companies say they don't target particular groups they're either the stupidest marketers in the world or they're lying."

Klesges also blames the proliferation of low-cost generic cigarettes for some of the recent increase. "One of the best predictors of prevention is the perception that cigarettes cost too much," he said. "Whether you convert to a daily smoker is whether you believe they're too expensive. And adolescent smoking is highly availably-related, which is why we want to get rid of the vending machines and things like that."

For Dena White, 18, initiation into the smoking scene simply meant accepting a boy's offer of a cigarette while hanging out with her ninth-grade friends in Cordova.

That was about five years ago. In a few months, she was buying cigarettes from a neighborhood convenience store clerk willing to ignore the minimum age law. (Federal regulations enacted this year require clerks to ask anyone under 27 for identification in a bid to catch people under the legal smoking age of 18.) A year and a half later, White believes, she was addicted. Now an accounting student at the University of Tennessee-Martin, she has tried to quit several times, with no luck.

"I don't know how to describe it. I just had this feeling inside me that I needed something," she said. "I would try to eat something instead and that wouldn't suffice."

Dena's mother, Carol White, has been trying to help her quit since Dena and some friends were caught buying cigarettes from a vending machine at Trinity Commons not long after she picked up the habit. A restaurant owner apparently tired of kids coming into the establishment called the police, who notified parents. Her secret was now a family problem.

"The more I fussed about it the more she wanted to smoke, so I was just pushing her in the direction of smoking," Carol White said. "So now I've quit except when I can get a little comment in here and there. I've discussed with her all the health risks. How the more she smokes now and gets addicted to it the harder it's going to be to quit. Her hair stinks. Her car stinks. She'll get wrinkles. Her teeth are dingy."

"I've tried to point out there's a strong history of cancer in our family. It's very frustrating, but really in all honesty there's nothing I can do."

A nonsmoking parent runs a gantlet of emotions trying to communicate concern with a teenager who has taken up the habit. Smoking can become a battleground for attempts to resolve a variety of generational conflicts.

"It can carry over into other parts of your relationship with your children. You have to be careful," said Elisia Walker, whose daughter Desiree, 18, has been smoking off and on for several years. "You want to say mean things to your child, and you realize that's not the way to reach that person. And there is peer pressure. You're having a battle with (their peers) as well as your own child."

What some people don't realize is that teenagers are not much different than adults once they've started smoking, said Leslie Robinson, assistant professor and grant director of the U of M Prevention Center.

"We've put in a grant proposal to get funds to do a smoking cessation program," Robinson said. "But we really haven't come to terms with the idea that it's hard for kids to quit smoking. People tend to think that because they're kids they're not addicted to cigarettes. But addiction develops quickly, and kids tend to have the same kinds of withdrawal symptoms that adults do. But (addiction) is socially stigmatic. That's why kids don't get treated."

The Prevention Center is in the fourth year of a six-year study of a group of nearly 7,000 Memphis City School students in an effort to find out why and when kids begin smoking. Surveys of the group began in the seventh grade and will continue through high school.

Last spring a smoking prevention program aimed at then-seventh-graders was piloted in several schools. It will be expanded to about half of the city's junior highs this fall, going beyond the health aspects of smoking to other issues of concern for junior high students.

Most seventh-graders, for example, have very negative attitudes toward smoking but don't realize how common their attitudes are.

And it will attempt to disabuse seventh-graders of the popular belief, especially among white girls, that smoking is an effective weight control method and try to give them some other strategies for staying slim.

The program also will try to teach seventh-graders how to refuse cigarettes.

"That can be a difficult situation for a teenager to handle," Robinson said. "One of the best strategies is to help them refuse and do it comfortably and confidently."

Among children of that age, "One of the most important components to teach is how many kids actually use cigarettes and what kinds of attitudes they have," Robinson said. "These kids tend to think (smoking is) much more prevalent than it is."

While almost a third of seventh-graders acknowledge they have smoked, only 4 percent smoke regularly. Asked how many of their classmates smoke, however, they estimate that more than 40 percent have the habit.

"Smoking is real salient to these kids," Robinson said. "A few smokers go a long way toward the perception that everybody does it. One of the most effective strategies, we believe, is to give kids information about actual prevalence and disabuse them of the idea that everybody does it."

At least among junior high students, the notion that everybody smokes remains a myth, Robinson said.

Meanwhile, among their older brothers and sisters, the myth moves closer to reality with each new survey.

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HOME PAGE

Is Anybody Getting The Picture?

Despite Ads, Teen-Age Smoking Is Unabated

By ANDREA ADELSON

LOS ANGELES, July 16 — At first glance, the billboard above a busy intersection here about eight miles west of downtown has all the markings of a classic cigarette advertisement. Expansive skies, mesquite-covered hills and bronzed cowboys, pausing on their horses for a trail-side chat, paint a picture of Marlboro country. Only the single line of copy surprises the unsuspecting driver: "Bob, I've got emphysema."

The ad that mockingly skewers an international tobacco icon is clearly powerful. Experts believe it and similar hard-edged ads are one of the reasons smoking rates have fallen over all in California in recent years.

What the state-run ad campaign has not done, however, is stop teen-agers from starting to smoke. Teen-age use, while lower than elsewhere in the nation, has — except for a statistically negligible decline last year — been on the rise since 1993.

To affect larger numbers of teen-agers, the negative ads must be combined with intensive educational efforts in the schools — more than California has provided, academic researchers say, citing a variety of studies.

The successes and failures of the California program, the nation's most ambitious for nearly a decade, have gained a new significance in light of the national settlement last month between tobacco companies and anti-smoking forces. The California program served as a model for the settlement.

One of the settlement's key goals is to cut teen-age smoking sharply, by 30 percent over five years

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and 60 percent over the next decade. And like the California program, one of its main tools is a broad "counter advertising" campaign.

Yet the settlement provides far less proportionately for school efforts than even the California program does. In California, for every dollar spent on advertising, roughly another \$1 is spent on the schools. Under the settlement, however, \$2.50 would be spent on advertising for every \$1 going to state and local education and prevention programs, including those at schools.

The state attorneys general and opponents of smoking who negotiated the settlement express confidence that their campaign will succeed because its impact will be magnified by an array of new marketing restrictions imposed on the industry. The pact would limit the distribution and marketing of tobacco products to children, for example, including bans on animated characters.

As insurance, they say, the tobacco companies have agreed to pay financial penalties if the targeted reductions in teen-age smoking are not reached. Even so, some advocates for public health have criticized the \$2 billion cap on the amount of such fines, saying that they should be unlimited.

The industry did not question the allocation of resources under the settlement, said Lance Morgan, a tobacco spokesman. It provides for \$500 million annually on media efforts and \$200 million for education and prevention.

William D. Novelli, president of the nonprofit organization Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and a participant in the settlement negotiations, stressed that the pact could still be fine-tuned.

"The academics are right; the best way to do public education is not media alone," he said. "These numbers were laid out in the heat of battle. This money may be moved around. We don't want to have just a media program."

On a separate issue, Mr. Novelli said the settlement contains provisions that would protect the content of negative advertising from industry interference. Some critics say such interference has muted the message of the California program.

The California ads, though, often deliver a powerful punch, particularly in a \$22 million billboard and television campaign that began in March, an effort that includes the cowboy scene.

In one TV spot, a woman who lost her larynx to throat cancer takes a drag through a hole in her throat, asking how cigarette makers can deny nicotine's addictiveness. Another has a toddler using blocks to spell out asthma, bronchitis and sudden infant death syndrome while an adult smokes nearby and an announcer, warns of the danger from secondhand smoke. A third spot also parodies a Marlboro ad: cowboys herd children, rather than cattle, into a pen, as a voice says, "Because once they get you where they want you, they got you for good." And in a bus poster, a suave man asks, "Mind if I smoke?" His female companion replies, "Care if I die?"

This week, state officials are scheduled to introduce ads intended to reach some ethnic and racial groups, including blacks and Asian-Americans, that have been showing a rise in smoking rates. In one TV spot, camaraderie among five Asian-American men on a car trip is spoiled when one passenger lights up. The offender is pushed out, landing beside a sign for Death Valley.

Still, the advertising cornerstone of the settlement is something of a gamble when it comes to teen-age smoking, some industry experts say. For one thing, anti-smoking campaigns can sometimes go so far that they end up glamorizing smoking by making it appear as tempting as forbidden fruit. Indeed, some experts note that the more smoking comes under attack by adults, the more attractive or "cooler" it becomes to many teen-agers, who typically feel immune from the physical dangers that cigarettes pose.

There are also doubts about the value of new, larger warning labels on cigarette packs, another element of the pact.

The settlement must still be approved by Congress. A White House task force reviewing the proposed deal has already expressed misgivings about some parts of the arrangement and is certain to suggest changes. Last week, President Clinton rejected as "totally unreasonable" a major element of the pact

that would impose restrictions on the Government's regulation of nicotine.

As it stands, the settlement would require cigarette companies to pay \$368.5 billion over 25 years to states for the costs of treating smoking-related illness and to individual plaintiffs as well as to finance the anti-smoking campaign.

California has been a leader in the fight against cigarettes since 1988, when voters approved Proposition 99, an initiative to raise cigarette taxes, and began adopting workplace and other restrictions, such as making bars smoke-free by 1998.

Last year, the extra tax of 25 cents a pack financed a \$129 million effort, which paid in roughly equal amounts for ads, school-based programs and grants to county health agencies and local community programs.

Since the California program began, the adult smoking rate steadily dropped, to 16 percent, from 26 percent, until last year, when it bumped up to 18 percent. Some people attribute that rise to changes in survey questions, but others say it is a result of industry interference with the campaign's message. Nationwide, the adult smoking rate is 25 percent.

By contrast, teen-age smoking rates, which stayed flat during the first years of the program at about 9 percent, began rising in 1993, to 11.9 percent in 1995 before declining slightly, to 11.6 percent, last year. The nationwide rate, which is not fully comparable because of different survey procedures, has also been rising and now stands at 16 percent.

A similar program in Massachusetts did little better, making headway only with eighth graders. "When a kid makes a decision to smoke in junior high, he's pretty immune to public health intervention," said Greg Connolly, director of the state's tobacco control program.

"I'd be interested to see the magic bullet," said Kimberly Belshé, director of California's Department of Health Services, which oversees most of the state's anti-smoking effort. "We know what doesn't work," she said, acknowledging that the money that goes toward school programs is not effectively used, sometimes getting diverted to general health topics. "It's a big chunk of money spread very thin."

The magic bullet is much heavier doses of school programs, argued Cornelia Pechmann, an associate professor of marketing at the University of California at Irvine. Nearly 100 studies show that smoking rates among students fall significantly when anti-smoking advertising is combined with intensive school-based education, she said.

As for adults, Stanton A. Glantz, a professor of medicine at the University of California at San Francisco and a new member of the state's tobacco oversight panel, blames political meddling for last year's resurgence in smoking.

"The old California campaign was extremely effective," Mr. Glantz said, citing one ad that questioned the industry's integrity. The ad used excerpts from Congressional testimony by tobacco executives who said nicotine was not addictive. A narrator said: "Now they want us to believe secondhand smoke isn't bad. Do they think we're stupid?"

Mr. Glantz contends the spot was pulled because of Gov. Pete Wilson's ties to the industry. The Governor has been criticized by anti-smoking groups for hiring Craig Fuller, a former Philip Morris executive, to manage his brief bid for the 1996

Republican Presidential nomination and for appointing Ms. Belshé, who worked in the tobacco industry's campaign against Proposition 99, to run the health department.

Ms. Belshé said the ad was pulled because one tobacco executive threatened litigation. "To continue to run the ad would raise an unacceptable legal risk," she said. As for going easy on tobacco, "the current spots make it clear the department is not backing away from its willingness to take on the industry."

Mr. Glantz cautioned that current anti-smoking sentiment is not an adequate safeguard against interference. "If the settlement goes forward, it requires continued aggressive vigilance because these campaigns cost this industry millions of dollars," he said, adding that it is not the same as taking on tuberculosis. "Tuberculosis doesn't make campaign contributions."

Political expenditures by the tobacco industry in California increased in 1994 to \$24.6 million, compared with \$7.6 million in 1992, according to "Undermining Popular Government," a 1995 report by the Institute of Health Policy Studies at the University of California at San Francisco. California's campaign cost the industry \$2 billion in lost sales in its first five years, says the report, co-written by Mr. Glantz.

The national settlement calls for an independent oversight panel made up of marketing and public health experts. "It would not be under the thumb of Congress," said Mr. Novelli of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

The settlement would also require larger warning labels, covering 25 percent of the front of cigarette packs. Nine new messages would take turns on the labels.

"The first wave of warnings will receive more noticeability," said Dean M. Krugman, a professor of advertising at the University of Georgia in Athens. "Then they're going to wear out."

For warnings to be effective, they must be meaningful to consumers, he said. But under the settlement, "there is no testing program put in place to find out which works."

The New York Times

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The Charlotte Observer

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Sold on Smoking

Even as more N.C. teens started smoking, the state legislature weakened the law aimed at preventing them from buying tobacco. A four-part series revealed the problem, explored possible solutions and — through the eyes of teenagers — told the stories of a tobacco state's battle with addiction.

DAY ONE



SUNDAY: N.C. smoking law lax

DAY TWO



MONDAY: Why more teens are smoking

DAY THREE



TUESDAY: Smoking not a priority for schools

DAY FOUR



WEDNESDAY: Stricter law proposed