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Stamp Out Smoking!

You can be a part of a tobacco-free day—and life

By TFK Kid Reporter Andrew Ravaschiere

All around the world, millions of kids and adults will be celebrating World No Tobacco Day on May 31, 2010. In 1988, a committee of the World Health Organization (WHO) created the event. WHO is an agency of the United Nations that focuses on health issues. According to the agency, more than one billion people are putting their lives at risk by smoking. People who smoke are more at risk of developing cancer, heart and lung disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

Campaigns like World No Tobacco Day are important in educating kids and adults. With increased awareness about the dangers of smoking more and more kids are choosing the healthy path to lead smoke-free lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), smoking has gone down dramatically in the past 13 years.

Don't Be A Target!

In the late 1990s, four large cigarette companies agreed to pay 46 states reimbursement for state health costs associated with smoking. The states use a portion of this money to fund anti-smoking programs, including anti-smoking awareness for young people.

From 1997 to 2003, the smoking rate for kids ages 12-17 dropped steadily. Recently, however, kid-smoking rates have remained steady. Joel London, spokesman for the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health, says that this may be due to the fact that cigarette companies spend big money trying to lure consumers. "Tobacco companies spend \$13 billion on advertising. That's more than \$36 million per day!" he says. According to London, 75% of that money is spent on incentives to get people to buy cigarettes such as buy-one-get one-free and bonus cigarettes, which make the price of cigarettes more affordable.



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One of the best ways to prevent kids from smoking is to teach them about the dangers of tobacco use.

"The tobacco industry has one goal in mind, which is to sell tobacco products and get people hooked on this product," says Karen Blumenfeld, director of the Policy and Legal Research Center of GASP (Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy). The non-profit group is dedicated to promoting smoke-free air.

April Schweitzer is the associate director of youth advocacy for the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, a group that fights to prevent young people from smoking. "One of the best ways [to prevent smoking] is educating what's in tobacco and how the tobacco industries target kids," she says. "We find kids do not want to be targeted or manipulated into using the product."

Kids are learning how to fight the cigarette companies' hard sell. Counter-marketing campaigns such as the Legacy Foundation's "Truth Campaign" has had, "tremendous success at getting kids to rebel against the tobacco industry," says London.

Join the Fight Against Smoking

Kids can make an enormous difference in the fight against smoking. According to Blumenfeld, 90% of all smokers start before the age of 18. "Kids can help by being strong and not ever smoking because every kid that doesn't start to smoke means that the tobacco industry will have one less person as an addicted consumer," she says.

Danny McGoldrick, of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, advises kids to offer encouragement to friends and adults who want to quit smoking. "I would give easy encouragement and help and support [them] when they are cranky," he says. "Lecturing doesn't work for anybody, whether you're talking to a kid or an adult."

Celebrating World No Tobacco Day is one way in which kids can join fight for a smoke-free world. "Kids can do something as simple as going to a park with a friend and setting up a booth with their information about World No Tobacco Day," says Blumenfeld.