

Durant Daily Democrat

Gateway to Lake Texoma

Examining tobacco marketing to women

“Deadly in Pink: Big Tobacco Steps Up Its Targeting of Women and Girls.” The tobacco industry has had a long history of targeting women as potential smokers, and this report confirms that tobacco companies have only increased their marketing efforts aimed at women and girls during the past decade. The American Legacy Foundation applauds and thanks these public health groups for examining this trend. During the past several years, we have witnessed Big Tobacco companies introduce new products that are undeniably marketed toward females young and old.

Just last fall, Philip Morris USA rolled out its newest product with its sights set directly on American women. Virginia Slims Super Slims Ultra Lights and Virginia Slims Super Slims Lights are ultra thin cigarettes packaged in a new, sleek pink box called “Purse Packs” and are undeniably targeted to women. Legacy has joined 33 other public health, consumer and women’s organizations in addition to the breast cancer awareness group, Susan G. Komen For the Cure, to increase awareness of this new product and point out the irony that Philip Morris announced it during October – National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

The impact of the new “Purse Packs” packaging on young women is a serious public health threat. Tobacco-related diseases kill about 174,000 women in the U.S. every year – one every three minutes. Lung cancer is the number one cancer killer of women. The tobacco industry deserves to be called to task for efforts like these that have serious implications for women’s health. Just more than a year ago, Legacy and other public health groups worked together to raise awareness about R.J. Reynolds’ marketing efforts around its Camel No. 9 brand – slickly packaged cigarettes that were obviously targeted at young women, with advertising in many women’s and fashion magazines.

Philip Morris’ Virginia Slims brand has been a thorn in the side of women’s health since its initial launch in 1968. The brand’s catch phrase, “You’ve Come a Long Way Baby,” invoked feelings of independence and strength and initiated a dangerous upward trend in young female smokers. This new product, promoting slim sleekness, has the potential to cause similar smoking trends.

Smoking affects a woman’s reproductive health and increases the risk of infertility, ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, preterm labor, stillbirth and AIDS. Smoking increases a woman’s risk of heart disease and lung disease, in addition to cancer of the bladder, cervix, esophagus, larynx, lung, kidney, oral cavity, pancreas and pharynx. Lung cancer, overwhelmingly caused by smoking, kills more women than any other cancer, including breast cancer.

These obvious efforts by the tobacco industry to encourage young women and girls to smoke their products are both insulting and dangerous. We must continue the fight to the industry from targeting potential female smokers through its products, marketing campaigns, and actions.

If you are wanting help and support to stop using tobacco, call the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at 1-800-QUIT NOW and /or log onto another resource Tobacco Stops With Me at “www.stopswithme.com.” The program is sponsored by the Bryan County Turning Point Coalition and Marshall County Partners in Progress Coalition. A tobacco control prevention program in Bryan and Marshall County Health Departments.

Renee Wyrick
CXP Tobacco Control
Assistant Coordinator
Bryan/Marshall counties