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Youth to Protest Tobacco Industry Sponsorship of PBR Event

More than 400 youth and adults from across the state will meet in downtown Oklahoma City this Saturday to lead a public street protest urging the Professional Bull Riders Inc. (PBR) to drop tobacco company sponsorship of their highly popular and successful sporting events. The U.S. Smokeless Challenger Professional Bull Riders Championship tour is in Oklahoma City this week and the U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company (USSTC), maker of Skoal and Copenhagen, is the title sponsor of the PBR event.

The protest will begin at 5 p.m. at the Brick street circle on Reno, between the Ford Center and the Cox Convention Center in downtown Oklahoma City, and will be led by Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT), a statewide youth movement that works to expose the tactics the tobacco industry uses to market its products to youth.

"We're excited that the sport is growing so much in popularity," said Atoka SWAT member Jennifer Fugate. "But we're concerned that the PBR athletes who display tobacco branding on their clothing are sending the message that chewing tobacco is part of being a grown-up or cowboy. Kids will imitate the behavior of their adult heroes and these guys are definitely heroes to many Oklahoma kids!"

The PBR Challenger Tour event will also feature smokeless tobacco sampling booths, scoreboards, banners, and other ads sponsored by the tobacco industry.

"We recognize that the PBR and USSTC have been partners for a long time, but any company who produces a product that kills when used as directed, is not a good sponsor. PBR should buck tobacco!" said Tanner Golden of Shawnee SWAT.

Smokeless tobacco use can lead to oral cancer, gum disease and nicotine addiction, in addition to increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease. In

Oklahoma, one out of five high school boys use smokeless tobacco, over twice the national average.

For more information about SWAT, visit www.OKSWAT.com. For information on national efforts to stop tobacco sponsorships of rodeo events, visit www.givetobaccotheboot.org.

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