

Big Tobacco's Impact on Kids and how we are combating it!

By Kate O'Stricker, Community Educator

Big Tobacco has its eye on new cigarette-buying customers: our children. The Federal Trade Commission reports that each year big tobacco spends \$12.8 billion, more than \$35 million a DAY, to market their deadly and addictive products. After all, they need to replace 400,000 US smokers that die each year with new, replacement customers.

New York has done a good job shielding our children from Big Tobacco- while most states have seen a slowing youth smoking declines, New York's rates have continued to decline steadily. The rate of smoking among New York high school students went down from 32.9% in 1997 to 13.8% in 2007. Current smoking among New York high school students has decreased by 58% since 1997.

The Federal Trade Commission recently released their reports on cigarette and smokeless tobacco sales, advertising and promotion. In 2006, in NYS alone big tobacco spent \$429.6 million to hawk their products, an increase of 20.40% from the 1998 baseline. If the tobacco industry can spend over one million dollars a day in NYS to peddle their products, can't the state spend more than the current \$68 million a year to protect our kids from the Big Tobacco?

Last year the NY tobacco control program was cut by 20%. This cut far exceeds that experienced by most state programs and was significantly larger than the across the board budget cuts applied since the beginning of the state fiscal crisis.

Big Tobacco is spending more to market their products in NYS and NYS is spending less to protect our kids from the tobacco industry. This deadly combination will likely erode the excellent progress made in youth smoking over the past decade.

The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids estimates that the budget cut imposed on the state's tobacco control program last year will result in 15,980 NY kids growing up to become addicted adult smokers and the increase in future health care expenditures to be \$279.6 million, of which \$77.8 million will be paid for by the state Medicaid program. These are human and financial increases that are costly and preventable.

Through funding from the Tobacco Control Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties' Tri-County Tobacco Free Program and the Advocacy in Action Grant from the NYS Department of Health Tobacco Control Program are working to increase the number of kids who don't ever start to smoke. We are working to help municipalities pass resolutions to create Tobacco Free Parks and Playgrounds and decreasing the number of tobacco advertisements in our local grocery stores that are visible to children. The Advocacy in Action grant is exclusively working in five college campuses in Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties to help create tobacco free zones on campus, and to help the colleges build strong tobacco

policies that will reinforce the tobacco free zones and increase the students knowledge of the importance of staying tobacco free and the tactics that Big Tobacco takes to target them as their next generation of tobacco users. The Tri County Tobacco Free Program is also asking pharmacies to stop selling tobacco products. Through these efforts our hopes are to reduce the burden of tobacco use on our counties and to make sure your children are not the next generation of smokers.

For more information on the Tri-County Tobacco Free Programs contact Kate O'Stricker at kmo11@cornell.edu, or Laurie Adams at lauriea@windstream.net, or our website at www.southerntierwellnesspartnership.org.