

For Immediate Release

Date March 28, 2007
Contact: Communication Office
802-863-7281
vdhco@vdh.state.vt.us

Mark Ray / Amie Fullington
802-862-8261
mark@ksvc.com / amie@ksvc.com

“BUTTS OF HOLLYWOOD” TAKES AIM AT CIGARETTE USE IN MOVIES

Burlington, VT – The Vermont Department of Health is launching its “Butts of Hollywood” campaign with two primary goals: to educate youth about tobacco use in the movies, and to inspire teens to think critically and start talking about what they are seeing onscreen.

The youth smoking rate in Vermont is currently 16 percent, close to the Vermont Department of Health’s goal of bringing the rate down to 15 percent by 2010. Exposing the influence of tobacco use in the movies could help reduce this number even further.

“The numbers are startling,” said Sharon Moffatt, RN, MSN, acting commissioner at the Vermont Department of Health. “Nearly 4 out of 5 of all American movies, including those targeted to youth, contain scenes with tobacco use. And studies show that youth who see smoking in the movies are almost three times more likely to try cigarettes. The result is that every day thousands of teens try their first cigarette because of seeing smoking in the movies.”

In an effort to reduce smoking among teens, the Department of Health funds Our Voices Xposed (OVX) – a youth-led organization dedicated to informing Vermont teens about big tobacco’s marketing practices. Among other features, the OVX website (www.ovx.org) will be host to an interactive experience called **OVX Studios**.

At **OVX Studios**, teens can get an interactive look at movie making, including casting, directing and product placement, by making their own animated film. The finished product is played for an animated “audience” who rates the movie based on its content and logic – and also gives feedback to help the moviemaker understand what the impact would be if they could put a product like cigarettes into their film.

“After surveying hundreds of teens at the Governor’s Youth Leadership Conference we worked with Burlington High School students and OVX members on this campaign, and they helped us gain insight into their tech-savvy generation,” said Sheri Lynn, tobacco control chief. “These efforts reinforced the importance of connecting with teens where they spend their free time – and that is often going to the movies, watching TV or on the Internet.”

For students involved in the campaign, the opportunity to provide input and guide the creative process was unique. Their feedback was pivotal to the development of all campaign materials and the teens often expressed excitement at seeing their opinions brought to life.

To kick off the “Butts of Hollywood” campaign, the Department of Health will launch a new series of animated TV spots that illustrate how big tobacco companies have historically inserted their products in the world of movies. They also question why tobacco product placement is still happening today when the big tobacco manufacturers are now banned from paying for placement of their products in movies. The spots will air during TV shows and movies that are popular with teens. The Department of Health is also getting the message out by showing OVX cinema slides prior to feature films on half of all the movie screens in Vermont, as well as displaying OVX movie posters in Vermont theaters and video stores.

Community tobacco coalitions, OVX groups and school-based educators from around the state have also teamed up with the Department of Health to organize a range of local events, including mock “Oscars” awards, a talent and costume show, a debate on issues like applying “R” rating to movies that show actors smoking, classroom activities, and movie night discussions.

###

To find out more about OVX, and to make your own animated movie, visit www.ovx.org.