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For Immediate Release:
March 9, 2004

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**LOS ANGELES COUNTY URGES ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY
TO STOP SMOKING IN YOUTH-ORIENTED MOVIES**

— Officials Cite Soaring Economic Costs Attributable to Tobacco Use —

LOS ANGELES (March 9, 2004) – Citing the continuing health concerns and the growing economic burden from tobacco-related diseases, Los Angeles County Public Health Director, Jonathan Fielding, M.D., M.P.H., today urged the entertainment industry to stop promoting smoking in youth-rated movies.

“Hollywood’s influence plays a major role in tobacco addiction,” said Fielding. “The entertainment industry’s pervasive and persuasive presence in our culture should discourage youth addiction to tobacco and not contribute to this problem, which remains the leading cause of premature death.”

Although Los Angeles County and the state of California have made great progress in reducing smoking rates, according to the California Department of Health Services, 4.7 million Californians still smoke. In Los Angeles County, an estimated 1.3 million people smoke.

(More)

“Tobacco use continues to take a terrible toll – physically, emotionally and financially – on people and families throughout California, and across the nation. The evidence is in. It is clear that children who see their favorite movie stars smoking in movies are more likely to start smoking, and to become addicted. Stars, studios, writers, directors and producers have a shared responsibility to eliminate this life threatening by-product of star power” said Fielding.

The cost of smoking in California is nearly \$16 billion annually, or \$3,331 per smoker every year, according to a report by the Institute for Health & Aging at the University of California, San Francisco. In Los Angeles, a cost analysis indicates that \$2.3 billion in direct smoking-attributable health care expenditures and \$2.0 billion in smoking-attributable lost productivity costs.

This year alone, more than 43,000 people in California will die prematurely from a tobacco-related disease, but millions more will suffer from debilitating diseases including heart disease, emphysema, and numerous cancers. In Los Angeles County, approximately 11,000 Angelenos lose their lives to a tobacco-related disease.

Los Angeles County Public Health Department joined other public health advocates and concerned groups from an estimated 18 other states nationwide as part of a “National Day of Action,” to help raise awareness about the ongoing problem of smoking in youth-rated films.