

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR DISCUSSES UNDERAGE SMOKING AND A NEW YOUTH ANTI-SMOKING BILLBOARD CAMPAIGN

Gov. Christie Whitman provides a weekly radio message to radio stations throughout the state. Each week, the message focuses on a different concern or event of interest to New Jerseyans.

This week the Governor discusses the problem of underage smoking. The Governor also talks about the steps the state has taken to combat underage smoking. These steps include a statewide billboard campaign that will help send the message that smoking is dangerous.

Attached is a text of the message.

The radio message can be accessed by calling the Governor's actuality line at 609-292-3249. It will be available today, beginning at noon, and will run through the weekend.

The address is also available on our website at <http://www.state.nj.us/governor/radio2.html>.

RADIO ADDRESS YOUTH ANTI-SMOKING

Hi, this is Governor Christie Whitman.

It's clear that tobacco use by young people is a national problem. Ninety percent of all new smokers are younger than 18 years of age.

Unfortunately, it's not just our teenagers. Children are making the decision to smoke at increasingly younger ages. According to our state's middle school survey, kids as young as 11 and 12 are experimenting with cigarettes.

Each year more than 30,000 young people in New Jersey take up the habit, and that's 30,000 too many.

Why are kids taking up smoking? Well, some of them think smoking will help them fit in with their peers, or make them seem more grown up. Some use it to lose weight. Others enjoy the excitement of taking risks.

Of course, over the years, the tobacco companies have spent a lot of money telling kids that smoking is cool. In fact, in a survey conducted by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, seven out of ten advertising executives say that cigarette advertising increases smoking among children and teenagers.

In a similar survey, more than 76 percent of young people 12 to 17 years of age believed that cigarette companies aim their ads at teens and try to sell them cigarettes.

But working together with groups like the National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids and the American Cancer Society, we hope to change all that.

We've worked harder to enforce the laws against selling cigarettes to under-age customers.

We've hiked the tax on cigarettes from 40 to 80 cents, which has led to a 12 percent decrease in number of tax stamps sold for cigarettes in New Jersey.

We're going to spend more than \$18 million this year - money from the settlement of our lawsuit against tobacco companies - for a campaign to prevent tobacco use.

And recently I unveiled a new statewide billboard campaign that will help send the message that smoking is dangerous.

As Governor, I have always stressed accountability and personal responsibility. I have invited everyone to become part of the solution to the smoking problem. That's why I encourage every young person in New Jersey to accept personal responsibility in the fight against smoking.

What does that mean? It means saying "no" to cigarettes. It means telling the people you know who already smoke that "smoking stinks." It means doing your part as a student and a citizen to get the message out to your family, your relatives, and your friends that smoking is dangerous and they shouldn't get sucked in.

If kids accept that responsibility today we will have a much better chance of winning the war against cigarettes tomorrow. And we will make New Jersey a state in which all we all breathe clean air, and grow up healthy and smokeless.

Thank you and have a great, smoke-free week.