

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **Governor Whitman Demonstrates Distance Learning; Unveils New Anti-Smoking Public Service Announcement**

To illustrate how technology can be used for interactive distance learning, Gov. Christie Whitman today unveiled a new anti-smoking public service announcement simultaneously to high school students at four different schools.

At the River Dell High School in Oradell, Gov. Whitman unveiled the new PSA while broadcasting live to three satellite schools, Wood-Ridge High School, Mahwah High School, and Hackensack High School.

The 30-second commercial, sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS), is entitled "Pass It On" and features Gov. Whitman passing a ball along with Kerry Kittles of the New Jersey Nets and Tim Thomas of the Philadelphia 76ers. The ad, which will air on most major New York and Philadelphia television and cable stations, delivers a straight-forward and hard-hitting message to kids: Don't smoke. It's disgusting.

"Hey kids. Smoking is a dirty, disgusting habit," Gov. Whitman says in the commercial. "It turns your lungs black and takes your breath away."

Gov. Whitman told the students of the four schools that the first weeks of school are a good time for refreshers to help remember important lessons learned in the past.

"Don't get sucked in by an addiction that can be very difficult to overcome. It will be a lot harder to stop smoking than to never start smoking in the first place," the Governor said.

"Don't get sucked in by those who say smoking is a personal choice that you should make on your own. Research shows second-hand smoke can hurt others as well. And the most at risk are those with whom you spend the most time: your family," she said.

Gov. Whitman told the students that taking responsibility for your own health is part of being a responsible adult. "In our society, it's too easy to blame somebody else when things go wrong. Don't fall into that trap. Take responsibility. Own up to your mistakes," Gov. Whitman said. "And, if you can, avoid the mistakes in the first place - especially the mistake of abusing your body with cigarettes or drugs."

The PSA is the latest in a series of youth anti-smoking ads produced by DHSS for its "Smoking. Don't Get Sucked In" campaign geared toward 11- to 17-year-olds. The campaign has also included posters and essay contests. The campaign has reached its young target audience via television, radio, print, theater and billboard ads, and a campaign website at [www.dontgetsucked.in.com](http://www.dontgetsucked.in.com).

Len Fishman, commissioner of the Department of Health and Senior Services who watched the unveiling with students at Wood-Ridge, said, "By making the choice not to smoke, not only are you preserving your health, you are sending a positive message to younger brothers, sisters, and neighbors, who are learning what it means to be a teenager by watching you. Make the right choice for you and them. Don't get sucked into smoking."

Smoking is the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the United States. Each year, more people die as a result of tobacco use than from AIDS, injuries sustained in motor vehicle crashes, fires, suicides, and homicides combined.

Ninety percent of new smokers are children and teens and one third of young people who continue smoking as adults will die prematurely of tobacco-related

illnesses. Nearly 40 percent of high school seniors have used tobacco within the past 30 days.

After taking live questions from students at all four schools, Gov. Whitman said that interactive distance learning is a valuable learning tool used throughout the state. An initiative by Gov. Whitman that dedicates \$50 million a year each year for five years will put distance learning in every public school in the state.

"Every student in New Jersey should be able to benefit from distance learning. Every student should be able to gain access to the people, places, and ideas to which distance learning can bring us," she said.