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Urgent call for comprehensive tobacco advertising ban

Tobacco advertising is ubiquitous in this country. Germany is almost the only country – besides Bulgaria – where large-sized tobacco advertising on billboards is still legal. In addition to traditional marketing, the tobacco industry also seeks direct contact with young people in order to entice them to smoke, according to a new report by the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) in Heidelberg.

Tobacco companies claim that advertising does not tempt people to smoke and that its goal is solely to maintain brand loyalty. However, it is a fact that tobacco advertising makes young people more aware about smoking and may encourage them to experiment with cigarettes and, ultimately, take up smoking. In 2012, the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) revealed the marketing strategies used by the German tobacco industry in a comprehensive report. In a new report, it now documents how the tobacco industry makes intensive use of all available marketing channels and increasingly targets potential customers directly.

For example, tobacco companies establish personal contact at events that are particularly popular among the youth, such as festivals and parties. At large music festivals, they attract young visitors to separate relaxation areas, where they promote their products. They use sweepstakes and giveaways to extract personal data from visitors. After the events, they directly mail these young people free samples, sweepstakes and social media features. The circle of potential new customers is then systematically enlarged by the recruitment of friends. Despite age verification measures, which are carried out fairly strictly, the fact that tobacco companies also reach youth via these marketing strategies cannot be avoided.

Even though tobacco companies market legal products, these are highly dangerous to one's health if used as intended. "The permanent and prevalent presence of tobacco advertising paints a picture that smoking is a desirable lifestyle, particularly for young people," says Dr. Martina Pötschke-Langer, head of the Cancer Prevention Unit at the DKFZ. "In this way, tobacco advertising counteracts the current trend towards non-smoking and undermines health policy efforts to lower the number of smokers within the population."

Only a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising that encompasses any kind of advertising or promotion can help prevent youth from taking up smoking and lowering tobacco consumption in the general population. By signing and ratifying the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), Germany entered into a legally binding obligation to take far-reaching tobacco control measures. One of these measures was to introduce a comprehensive tobacco advertising ban by 2010. Therefore, the German government is long overdue in fulfilling its task of prohibiting advertising of a product that is dangerous to one's health.

The report, entitled "Direktmarketing für Tabakprodukte in Deutschland" (in German) (Direct marketing of tobacco products in Germany), is available for download at:

http://www.dkfz.de/de/tabakkontrolle/download/Publikationen/RoteReihe/Rote_Reihe_Band_21_Direktmarketing_fuer_Tabakprodukte_in_Deutschland.pdf

The German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) with its more than 3,000 employees is the largest biomedical research institute in Germany. At DKFZ, more than 1,000 scientists investigate how cancer develops, identify cancer risk factors and endeavor to find new strategies to prevent people from getting

cancer. They develop novel approaches to make tumor diagnosis more precise and treatment of cancer patients more successful. The staff of the Cancer Information Service (KID) offers information about the widespread disease of cancer for patients, their families, and the general public. Jointly with Heidelberg University Hospital, DKFZ has established the National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) Heidelberg, where promising approaches from cancer research are translated into the clinic. In the German Consortium for Translational Cancer Research (DKTK), one of six German Centers for Health Research, DKFZ maintains translational centers at seven university partnering sites. Combining excellent university hospitals with high-profile research at a Helmholtz Center is an important contribution to improving the chances of cancer patients. DKFZ is a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers, with ninety percent of its funding coming from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the remaining ten percent from the State of Baden-Württemberg.

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