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No billboard advertising of tobacco products - for the protection of minors

Germany is the only European country still allowing unrestricted advertising of tobacco products on large billboards. This type of advertising deliberately targets young consumers. A current publication by the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) shows that two thirds of adolescents and young adults are consciously aware of billboard advertising, and are thereby encouraged to start smoking. At the same time, a current survey suggests that the majority of the population supports a ban of billboard advertisement for tobacco products.

“The tobacco companies argue that cigarette advertisements do not tempt people into smoking. Instead it serves solely as information for adult smokers. But the promotional activities worth around 200 million Euro annually do not just reach adult smoking population, but also most of the adolescents.” explains Dr. Ute Mons, Head of the Cancer Prevention Unit at DKFZ. “This illustrates our analysis of a Pan-European survey by the European Commission.”

According to the analysis, 62% of the respondents (15 years of age and older) are consciously aware of tobacco advertising in Germany. Compared to other European countries, Germany is well above the EU average of 42%. Billboards represent the largest share of tobacco advertising in Germany: 48% of survey participants were consciously aware of outdoor tobacco advertising. “We are worried about the fact that tobacco advertising on posters and billboards appeals especially to adolescents and young people: More than 70% of 15 - 17 year olds and young adults aged between 18 and 30 notice this type of advertising, whereas only 50% of those aged over 60 do.” says Dr. Katrin Schaller, research assistant at the Cancer Prevention Unit.

Tobacco advertisement lodges itself in the consciousness of young people, promotes a positive attitude towards smoking as a desirable habit, and increases the likelihood for the decision to start smoking in this target group. “Around 120.000 people die from the effects of smoking every year, mostly from cancer, closely followed by cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.” explains Michael Boutros, acting scientific director at DKFZ. „In order to prevent adolescents and young people from smoking long-term, effective legal measures for tobacco control are essential. This also includes a comprehensive ban on advertising.“

Comprehensive bans on tobacco advertisement effectively contribute to lowering the proportion of smokers in the population. Germany already ratified the WHO framework agreement on tobacco. „The German Government should fulfill its contractual obligation for a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertisement and, as the last country in the EU, should immediately ban outdoor advertisement for tobacco products” states Ute Mons. „The timing is particularly apt: According to a current DKFZ survey, about three quarters of the population are in favor of banning this type of advertisement.“

The publications „Billboard tobacco advertising appeals to young people – urgent need for a ban on outdoor advertising for tobacco products“ and „Strong support of banning outdoor advertising for tobacco products“ are available at www.tabakkontrolle.de.

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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