

Smoke screen

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Hollywood anti-smoking activist is in Mumbai to help NGOs take on smoking in Indian movies

He admits being the most hated man in Hollywood. But that hardly

Must dos for Bollywood

- * Any film which shows or implies tobacco should be rated "R" except those which show the dangers of tobacco
- * Studios and theatres should run strong anti-smoking ads before running any movie showing presence of tobacco
- * No brand identification nor billboards in background of any movie screen

matters to Professor Stanton Glantz from University of California, internationally acclaimed tobacco control activist. His mission – to influence leading Hollywood stars to give up smoking in movies, is fast gaining popularity in US, even as thousands of kids joined his campaign – Smoke Free Movies (SFM) telling favourite stars to give up the light.

In Mumbai recently, Glantz met several city NGOs who are also preparing for a similar strategy to influence leading Bollywood stars to give up smoking on screen. "Smoking in the movies is the most powerful pro-tobacco influence and stronger amongst non-smokers. Research has shown that smoking in movies help cigarette sales, as 52 per cent of kids start smoking after watching movie stars light up," explains Glantz.

His campaign to take on Hollywood is simple – try voluntary effort rather than legislation to tell top stars not to smoke on screen. Big tobacco companies and Hollywood have a long history of association, as major cigarette brands have found it a powerful medium to sell cigarettes. When brand promotion in movies was banned by US Congress in 1990, says Glantz, tobacco companies began focusing on showing actors smoking, with the result that smoking on screen in PG13 (teen movies) increased by 50 percent.

Engaging thousands of kids, the SFM campaign wrote to top stars like Cameron Diaz, Brad Pitt, Colin Farrell and Julia Roberts against smoking. While none of them have replied, Roberts sent back the letter stating – 'Do not mail', stating how she does not have time to read her mail, says Glantz. The arrogance of leading actors angered the fans and provided a much-needed boost to the campaign, he adds.

Glantz provides an agenda, which he states can be also used to tackle desi stars too. The money link, says Glantz, is all too evident. "Hollywood is getting paid to promote tobacco – if it's true, it is corrupt. If stars are doing it free, they are stupid to harm teenagers. It's time they realise how influential their on-screen habits are to the kids."