

# impacTEEN NEWS

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## **BILLBOARD BAN HAVING MINIMAL EFFECT ON TOBACCO ADVERTISING**

### *Study Shows Tobacco Industry Finding Other Ways to Market Products*

The 1999 ban on billboard advertising has not deterred the tobacco industry from marketing its products, according to a new study. Research conducted at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) shows that the industry is simply shifting its advertising dollars to other environments.

Tobacco billboard advertising was banned, in part, to limit the ability of the tobacco companies to market their products to kids; however, the results of the UIC study indicate the point-of-sale environment is assuming an even greater importance in the tobacco industry's marketing efforts. "The shift in advertising expenditure is likely to mean that any intended effect of the billboard advertising ban – as well as other advertising restrictions – will not be fully realized since overall exposure to advertising and promotion may not be reduced," said Frank Chaloupka, professor of economics at UIC. "Given the high level of youth exposure to point-of-purchase marketing efforts, this could slow the goal of reducing youth smoking."

Chaloupka is the director of ImpacTeen, part of "Bridging the Gap," a five-year research project designed to improve the understanding of how policies and other environmental factors influence youth substance abuse. The project, administered at UIC's Health Research and Policy Centers, is funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the nation's largest health philanthropy.

The study is the first comprehensive research to investigate changes in point-of-purchase practices across the United States before and after the April 24, 1999, nationwide ban on tobacco billboard advertising, a provision of the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between the state attorneys general and the tobacco industry. UIC made observations in 1,484 stores (43%) between February 16 and April 23, 1999; and, in 1,980 stores (57%) between April 24 and June 23, 1999. Findings include:

- Interior advertising was observed in 80 percent of stores visited after the ban; **a 27 percent increase in probability that a given outlet would have this particular type of advertising or promotion.**
- Exterior advertising was observed in 60 percent of stores visited after the ban; **a 22 percent increase.**
- There was also an increase in the **extent** of exterior store advertising before and after the ban; 42 percent of stores were found to have a high level of exterior advertising, **a 30 percent increase.**

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## UIC/Tobacco Ads = Add One

- Tobacco promotions were observed in 52 percent of stores visited after the ban; **a 65 percent increase** (including a 39% increase in multi-pack discounts, a 153% increase in ‘gift-with-purchase’ promotions, and, a 65% increase in cents-off promotions).
- Branded functional objects (such as clocks, shopping baskets or display shelving) displaying tobacco advertising were observed in 73 percent of stores visited after the ban; **a 63 percent increase**.

The timing of the study follows the announcement by Philip Morris, one of the largest tobacco producers in the United States, of its decision to pull advertising from 42 publications with large youth readerships. “While we see Philip Morris’ decision as a positive step, the findings of our study give cause for concern,” said Frank Chaloupka,. “When advertising resources are merely taken from one environment and put in another, for instance, from billboards to point-of-purchase, the positive effect of partial advertising bans may be lost.”

Over the past several decades, numerous studies have researched the impact tobacco advertising and marketing have on youth; for instance, there is substantial evidence that cigarette advertising and promotion increases youth smoking, having both predisposing and reinforcing effects on youth smoking. “We know that, like advertising and promotional strategies used in publications with high youth readerships, the point-of-purchase environment has high levels of youth exposure and is likely to influence youth perceptions and use of tobacco,” said Chaloupka. “On the other hand, we don’t know exactly to what extent the increase in point-of-purchase advertising will have on youth or adult smoking.”

While the findings of the UIC study are important, they lead to further questions. “Further research is needed to examine, monitor and evaluate the impact of the billboard advertising ban and other restrictions on cigarette marketing contained in the Master Settlement Agreement,” said Chaloupka.

One of the goals of the ImpacTeen project is to bring together data from numerous sources, which, collectively, can provide more definitive information on the actual extent and importance different advertising environments have on smoking levels. ImpacTeen hopes to provide researched-based evidence that will help legislators and public health officials develop effective policies and programs to reduce youth smoking.

“If future research finds the extent to which advertising affects youth smoking rates, policy makers may then have additional evidence to support a comprehensive ban,” said Chaloupka.

The complete text of the UIC study can be found on the Internet in the ImpacTeen Research Paper Series, titled “Changes at the Point-of-Sale for Tobacco Following the 1999 Tobacco Billboard Ban” located at

**[www.uic.edu/orgs/impacteen](http://www.uic.edu/orgs/impacteen)**