

DOC Urges Kids to Skip the Challenge

DOC, a national health promotion group known for its pungent satires of tobacco and alcohol promotions, is taking out advertisements urging the children of Aspen, Colorado to boycott the Philip Morris Company's Marlboro Celebrity Ski Challenge to be held in that city on January 4 and 5th. The DOC ads ask children to "Skip the Challenge", renaming the event the "Celebrity Cigarette Sell-Out."

In recent years, Philip Morris the nation's number one cigarette advertiser, has stepped up the association between skiing and now accounts for one of every five cigarettes sold in America. Surveys by DOC have found that Marlboro is the runaway favorite cigarette brand among children and teenagers.

"The Ski challenge is a cigarette promotion for young people, pure and simple," said Dr. Alan Blum, a Houston family physician who founded DOC in 1977. The company has found a way to turn the slopes of the regions beautiful Maroon Bells into Marlboro billboards."

California artist Doug Minkler who created the DOC advertisement is also angry about the public's increasing inability to avoid cigarette advertisements. "If there's one thing people detest in cities it's billboards. They come to the mountains to give their eyes a rest from that visual pollution."

Blum noted that the televising of the Marlboro Ski Challenge provides Philip Morris with an inexpensive way to associate cigarettes with sports prowess as well as to convey the Marlboro message to millions of children at home.

One of the first to call attention to the effectiveness of the Marlboro Ski Challenge in recruiting children is Dr. Brent Blue, a family physician in Jackson Hole, Wyoming and DOC's Wyoming chapter president. Three years ago Blue surveyed fourth and fifth grade students and found that those children who skied on slopes with a Marlboro race course were likely to associate Marlboro as the favorite of ski racers.

Philip Morris boasts that the event will support the Denver chapter of Second Harvest National Food Bank. A fundamental strategy of cigarette company promotions is the use of local charities to help legitimize the event and to divert public attention from the primary commercial objective. Previous such promotions by Philip Morris have provided only a small fraction of funding in comparison to the amount spent on advertising the cigarette brand in conjunction with the event.

Skip the Challenge
Page 2

In its advertisements, Philip Morris also claims the race will "attract" political figures and sports celebrities. But the athletes shown in the ads are all already on the Philip Morris payroll to promote Marlboro and Virginia Slims cigarettes.

DOC is concerned that at a time when parents and teachers are expressing growing concern over teenage drug use, and its economic and physical cost to society, elected officials and the business community for the most part remain silent in the face of the increasing promotion to young people of cigarettes and beer. The death toll from tobacco and alcohol is more than 100 times that of all illegal drugs combined. Yet the growing contribution of the tobacco corporations, along with extensive tobacco ties to retail outlets from food stores to gas stations, effectively prevent obstacles for legal drug profiteers.

"Just say no to drugs may sound good," says DOC founder Dr. Alan Blum, "as long as we don't interfere with Philip Morris promoting 'Just say yes to Marlboro' on the ski slopes."

The event is co-sponsored by Ski Magazine, published by the Times-Mirror Company, one of the largest media corporations in the United States. Times-Mirror publications include The Los Angeles Times, The Sporting News, Sport, and C.V. Mosby medical books.

In recent years, Times-Mirror's sports magazines have become increasingly reliant on cigarette advertising, which accounts for as much as 60% of the revenue of some issues of The Sporting News and Sport. The January issue of Ski Magazine contains a 2-page advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes ski wear collection and a 16-page advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes and the Danny Sullivan Marlboro Cigarettes Celebrity Ski Challenge, which may be the most extensive cigarette advertising ever to appear in an American sports publication.

In 1989 the past chairman of Times-Mirror, Franklin P. Murphy, M.D., received the prestigious Charles A. Dana Award for pioneering achievements in health and higher education. Neither Philip Morris nor Times-Mirror has announced whether it will sponsor Danny Sullivan for the award in 1990.