



News Release

For Immediate Release:
Monday, October 16, 2006

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‘What Were We Thinking?’ New Anti-Tobacco Commercials Take Aim at Smoking Attitudes of Bygone Eras *Satirical ads parody smoking’s role in society*

SALT LAKE CITY – A provocative series of television commercials illustrating the somewhat incongruous presence of smoking in public areas of the past – on an airplane, in a doctor’s office, etc. – is being introduced by the Utah Department of Health’s Tobacco Prevention and Control program (TPCP) this week.

The television spots, scheduled to begin airing on Utah television stations this week, display ridiculous-in-hindsight scenarios in which smoking used to be commonplace: For example, one of the 30-second commercials, set on an airplane in the late ‘60s, shows nearly every passenger smoking a cigarette, a cabin filled with smoke and, absurdly, everyone carrying on as though there’s not a problem in the world with it.

Which, given what we knew at the time, there wasn’t: Hence the theme, “What were we thinking?”

“The goal of the ads is to remind Utahns of how far we’ve come in terms of tobacco knowledge and prevention,” said Lena Dibble of the TPCP. “It seems so ridiculous now that we allowed smoking in some of these places. In a few years’ time, we believe we’ll all look back on where we allow smoking even today, and say once again, what were we thinking?”

Recent changes made to the Utah Clean Air Act (SB19) will lead to Utah becoming the 12th state in the country to be “smoke free” by early 2009. The new commercials are aiming to ease the transition period by making us remember a time when smoking was even more prevalent – and how ludicrous that seems today.

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Bygone Eras

“Our message may seem lighthearted, but it also provides perspective,” Dibble said. “What we’re looking forward to is a healthier environment for everyone.”

Other television commercials in the new series are set in a ‘60s-style diner where almost everyone, including the cook, has a cigarette hanging out of his or her mouth; in a professional office setting in the early ‘70s that is filled with smoke during a meeting; and, perhaps most outrageously, at a doctor’s office about 50 years ago, with a young boy being examined by his pediatrician – while the doctor is smoking.

The spots, created and produced by the Crowell/Love Partnership in Salt Lake City in conjunction with Blissium Productions, were shot on vintage “Super 8” film to give them the appropriate scratched, grainy quality and visual look of the eras depicted. Graphics on the spots also reflect the times they illustrate (the diner spot is also shot in black and white).

The commercials have been scored with music appropriate for the period, and the actor’s costumes, hairstyles, props and other details are also painstakingly matched to recreate a fly-on-the-wall sense of “being there.”

“We look back now and say, ‘Can you believe we allowed smoking on planes?’,” Dibble said. “In the beginning of change, there is always hesitation. One day we’ll say, ‘Can you believe we allowed smoking in clubs?’”

Each of the spots is tagged with the tobaccofreeutah.org website, which viewers can visit to find out more about the upcoming changes and discover other tools and resources to help them quit smoking.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public’s health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.