

**David BYRNE**

European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection

## **Tobacco prevention among young people**

*Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Tobacco, Youth Prevention and Communication Conference

**Rome, 14 November 2003**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address this Conference on media and tobacco prevention among young people.

The issues on the agenda for this event are of vital importance. Tobacco kills half a million European citizens every year.

Despite claims to the contrary from the Tobacco Industry, our youth is their target to ensnare the new victims they need to replace those that die from smoking related diseases.

Successful tobacco control must tackle the problem from every conceivable angle.

That is why the Commission takes a multi-faceted approach – including legislation, active participation in international tobacco control initiatives, support to tobacco control networks and projects, and the development of an ambitious communication strategy.

Communication is important tool for the tobacco industry. We are actively fighting its efforts:

- first, by limiting the possibilities for the industry to promote their products, through stringent legislation; and
- second, by promoting the “de-normalisation” of smoking through large scale tobacco prevention campaigns.

The past year has seen important and significant progress in the Community’s fight against tobacco, with the adoption of the Directive on Tobacco Advertising together with the Council Recommendation on the prevention of smoking and on initiatives to improve tobacco control.

The Directive provides for a ban on tobacco advertising in the press and other printed publications, on the radio and on the internet. Tobacco advertising on television is already banned under the Television without frontiers Directive.

The Directive also provides for prohibition of tobacco sponsorship for radio programmes and for events having cross-border implications.

The Recommendation complements these binding provisions, by calling upon Member States to prohibit indirect tobacco advertising, billboard and poster advertising, and cinema advertising.

The Recommendation also promotes measures to reduce the availability and supply of tobacco products to children and adolescents.

And it calls on Member States to oblige tobacco manufacturers to disclose the expenditure they incur on advertising and sponsorship, and to provide protection from exposure to passive smoking.

In parallel with limiting the opportunities for the tobacco industry to advertise and push their products, I also want to raise awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco consumption.

As a follow-up to the Tobacco Products Directive of 2001, the Commission has recently adopted a Decision on the use of colour photographs and other illustrations as graphic health warnings on tobacco products.

This will strengthen the impact of the new and bigger health warnings which are now mandatory across the EU.

But in addition to legislative measures, large scale information campaigns also have a key role to play.

The Europe-wide "*Feel free to say no*" campaign is now in its third year. The objectives of the campaign are ambitious, yet unequivocal: young people across Europe should be dissuaded from trying smoking, or persuaded and encouraged to stop.

This rolling campaign needs to be fine-tuned to accord with the latest scientific evidence and national tobacco control activities. That is why I encouraged a very wide consultation process, to enable constant updating and improvement of the campaign.

The first step was the formation of an expert panel to advise the Commission on strategy and on the campaign material.

The second step has been to identify and recruit National Focal Points to adjust the campaign according to national languages and cultures, and to achieve overall coherence of the campaign as a whole.

As a consequence the campaign has progressed – with its focus shifting to an older age group with stronger messages.

"Feel free to say no" now informs young people about the intensive lobby work carried out by Big Tobacco, about their marketing and promotional tricks.

The campaign has sharpened its tone markedly this year, incriminating the tobacco industry to such an extent that in a recent TV spot the industry threatened to take us to court.

Before I finish, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the campaign and to assure them that their recommendations are of primary importance not only for the development of the current campaign but also for future activities.

The time has now come to expand our consultation process to the media and global tobacco control experts.

Ladies and gentleman, we all know that tobacco kills. Communicating this message, in particular to young people, is a major and difficult challenge.

In developing strong messages and effective methods of communication, we need to pull together all our experience, know-how and expertise, which is precisely the objective of this major conference here today.

I am sure most of you know that tobacco control is not only a political priority, but also a personal priority for me.

I can also assure you that tobacco control is firmly anchored in the Community's agenda.

We have made substantial progress in recent years – but we need to keep up the pressure.

We owe it to our citizens to continue the fight to further marginalise smoking within European society.

I am grateful for all your support – and I look forward to continuing working with you in future.

Thank you.