WHY IS MENTHOL USED IN TOBACCO PRODUCTS?

Menthol’s anesthetic and cooling qualities suppress the coughing reflex, allowing smokers to inhale much more deeply, causing harmful particles to settle deeper inside the lungs. The Tobacco Industry relies on menthol to mask the harsh taste of tobacco, making the smoke feel smoother on the consumers’ throat.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Because menthol is more than just a flavor for the tobacco industry, they have worked tirelessly to protect their profits and keep menthol in cigarettes when all other flavorings have been banned. Menthol tobacco products have been shown to be the gateway tobacco products for women, minorities and youth. The unique qualities of menthol make it easier for new smokers like teens to start smoking, are more addictive, and thus harder to quit. Targeted marketing of menthol tobacco products, particularly e-liquids and pods, is rampant online and on social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok which are primarily used by teens. A recent study showed that pulegone, a cancer-causing compound banned by U.S. regulators last year as a food additive, has been found at potentially dangerous levels in mint and menthol flavored e-cigarette liquids and smokeless tobacco products.

HOW DOES IT IMPACT HAWAI‘I?

Menthol is one of the most popular flavors of tobacco products - according to the FDA, 64% of high school students that use menthol or mint e-cigarettes in 2019. Furthermore, in Hawai‘i 78% of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander tobacco users smoke menthol cigarettes, compared to 42% of Caucasians. These differences have led to appalling health disparities - Native Hawaiians and Filipinos die from lung cancer at higher rates than Caucasians. This is a direct result from the Tobacco Industry actively promoting these products in our community, even going as far as calling Hawai‘i a "menthol market!"

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander tobacco users that smoke menthol cigarettes

The Tobacco Industry has targeted Hawai‘i for many years, deeming the state a "menthol market." The specific targeting of a population of people using racial, ethnic and/or cultural appropriation is well-documented when it comes to how the Tobacco Industry has historically marketed and sold menthol cigarettes.

**FOLLOWING A PATTERN OF TARGETING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**

For decades, Big Tobacco has aggressively marketed menthol cigarettes to the African American community by distributing free samples at community events, "casting" African American models in ads and commercials, using of words and phrases commonly used by the community, and sponsorship of sporting events or musical festivals that cater to the Black audiences. This type of targeting has unfortunately has been very effective, as 88% of African American smokers use menthol cigarettes. Today, this trend continues as tobacco companies exploit Hawaii’s culture with flavors like "Hawaiian Punch" and childhood favorite Hi-Chew candies.

**TOBACCO INDUSTRY DOCUMENTS PROVE THE CONNECTION**

The two quotes below are from Tobacco Industry documents dating back to September 1975. Looking to expand market share for the brands Salem, KOOL and More in the "Hawaiian market," tobacco executives utilized the marketing strategies successfully tested in the African American community. In particular, they used aspects of Hawaii’s culture as a marketing strategy.

The SALEM campaign would probably benefit by being tailored (casting) to this market similar to our black ethnic efforts in the states. In regard to the use of the term "shaka," my reaction is that we should proceed slowly. If, as it would appear, this term is indigenous to the language, we might run a real risk of using it in such an overtly commercial market. I am sure this concern could be researched.

**CONTACT**

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