

Settlement Over Hip Hop Cigarettes

Written by Westside ID225

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Following a lawsuit over cigarette-advertising tactics, R.J. Reynolds has agreed to restrictions on future promotions.

The lawsuits had asserted that Brown & Williamson Tobacco Co.'s 2004 "Kool MIXX" promotion -- which was billed by the company as a "celebration" of Hip Hop music and culture -- violated the 1998 tobacco Master Settlement Agreement by targeting African-American youth.

The settlement was reached with R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., which acquired the assets of Brown & Williamson in July.

Under the settlement, R.J. Reynolds agreed to limitations on all future "Kool MIXX" promotions, and agreed to pay \$1.46 million to be used for youth smoking prevention purposes.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and Maryland Attorney General J. Joseph Curran Jr. announced the settlement of their lawsuits earlier this month.

"This settlement is important for two reasons," Spitzer said. "First, it sends a strong message to the tobacco industry that we will not tolerate efforts to market cigarettes to children.

"Second, this is the first time that the industry has agreed to marketing limitations that are even stricter than those set forth in the MSA, which will be helpful in future enforcement efforts.

"Overall, this landmark settlement will reduce the number of children who start smoking, and thereby protect them from a lifetime of addiction and disease."

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Curran also cited the smoking-related health hazards and its relation to the black community.

"As the nation's leading cause of preventable death, tobacco kills over 45,000 African-Americans each year," Curran said. "This campaign targeted a Hip Hop audience, including youth.

"I hope this settlement sends a strong message that kids are off-limits for tobacco companies."

Madigan accused the cigarette company of deceptively enticing children into smoking.

"The tobacco industry has been creative when it comes to trying to lure our children into a lifetime of addiction," Madigan said. "Since the Master Settlement Agreement was reached in 1998, companies have tried to get around the prohibition on marketing to youth.

"This settlement says "no more." No more cartoons on packages. No more graffiti spray-paint games on CD-ROMs. No more advertising in magazines popular with teens. No more packages that can be pieced together to make a puzzle."

Madigan continued, "This case demonstrates that for every trick the tobacco industry tries to get around the Master Settlement Agreement, we will fight back to protect the health of our children."

The "Kool MIXX" promotion focused on Hip Hop music and culture, and included: Hip Hop DJ "mixing" competitions with cash prizes held in New York, Illinois, Maryland and 10 other states; the nationwide distribution of 1 million CD-ROMs featuring Hip Hop music and interactive games; the distribution of 750,000 "special edition" Kool cigarette packs with Hip Hop design graphics; and the creation of a "House of Menthol" Web site that had a flawed "age verification" system.

[Source](#)

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