

Cigarettes remain popular

by MELINDA URICK *Teen Correspondent*

Friday, September 2, 1994

Graham Lee Hemminger said in a poem, "Tobacco is a dirty weed. I like it."

More and more teens are following Hemminger by lighting up.

Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. And the number of teen smokers in high school has increased from 17 percent to 19 percent between 1992 and 1993, according to a study done by a public affairs radio program.

United States Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders said, "Nearly all first use of tobacco occurs before high school graduation... {smoking} is an adolescent addiction."

Once someone is addicted to the drug nicotine, found in cigarettes, they have a hard time quitting. Almost 70 percent of adult daily smokers become addicted by the age 18.

"Each year, more than 1 million American children under 18 become regular smokers," said a spokesperson for the Federal Office on Smoking and Health. "That means they replace at least two-thirds of the adult smokers who either quit or die. If the grown-ups are getting the message, why aren't the kids?"

Advertising companies spend over \$4 billion each year on cigarette advertising, with the intention to promote brand switching among adults. But 90 percent of new smokers come from young people less than 18 years of age, equaling almost three million adolescent smokers in the U.S.

The government wants to increase taxes on cigarettes, making a pack much more expensive, so fewer kids can afford to buy them -- the idea being the prohibitive cost may force them to quit.

Allen Davis from the American Cancer Society said that it's a popular thing for kids to talk about quitting, but "only one and a half of teen smokers have been able to quit."

As said on cigarette packs, quitting smoking now will greatly reduce serious health risks in the future.

You can write the American Medical Association about smoking at 515 North State St., Chicago, Ill. 60610.

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