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MALLS AND MOVIE THEATERS SAY INFERTILITY IS NOT FOR THEM

Second Annual “Protect Your Fertility!” Campaign Rejected by Shopping Malls and Movie Theaters Around the Country

WASHINGTON, DC—The same malls that house Victoria’s Secret and theaters that show movies full of sex and violence rejected a public service campaign on infertility prevention. Shopping malls in Houston, Boston, San Francisco, and Washington, DC and AMC, Century, and Lowes theaters refused to display the public service announcements (PSAs), claiming that they were not family friendly or entertaining.

The PSAs are part of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine’s effort to educate the public about risks to their fertility. In its second year, the “Protect Your Fertility!” campaign targets men and women in their twenties and early thirties to inform them that decisions they make now can impact their fertility later in life. The campaign focuses on risk factors such as smoking, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unhealthy body weight, and advancing age.

As part of that effort, ASRM planned to post the PSAs on movie theater slides and around shopping malls in four cities. The PSAs, which feature baby bottles being used in unconventional ways, were designed to be bold and provocative in order to catch the attention of those unaccustomed to thinking about fertility.

“While the PSAs were certainly meant to be thought-provoking, we were surprised that the malls and theaters objected to our message,” said Dr. Michael Soules, past-president of ASRM. “How can the idea of providing information to allow people to be able to have a family later in life not be family friendly? Apparently gratuitous violence and sexually provocative advertising are okay but talking about a public health issue that affects 6.2 million American men and women is not.”

More than 10 percent of the reproductive-age population suffers from infertility, yet it is often perceived as an inconvenience, rather than a preventable disease. Last year, ASRM launched an on-going campaign designed to help people make the connection between their decisions now and their ability to have children in the future. By making people aware of risk factors such as smoking, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unhealthy body weight, and age many cases of the disease can be prevented.

“Far too few people are aware that their decisions and bad habits now can impact their eventual ability to have children,” said Soules. “While most people are well-versed in the risks that alcohol poses to their liver and smoking poses to their lungs, rarely do they hear the message that they need to protect their reproductive health.”

Though that prevention message will not be in malls and movie theaters, this year’s campaign will appear in other venues. Packets that include a poster and multiple copies of a magazine style newsletter are being distributed to college health centers, community health centers, Planned Parenthood centers, and YWCA gyms to coincide with National Infertility Awareness Week.

The rejected movie PSAs feature four alternating slides with graphics that depict unconventional uses of baby bottles:

- **SMOKING**

Graphic: Cigarette using a baby's bottle as an ashtray.

Headline: IF YOU SMOKE THIS MIGHT BE YOUR ONLY USE FOR A BABY'S BOTTLE.

Text: Smoking can affect your ability to have children. It can cause infertility in women and men.

- **SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS**

Graphic: Baby's bottle with a condom leaning against it.

Headline: PRACTICING SAFE SEX NOW PROTECTS YOUR ABILITY TO HAVE CHILDREN LATER.

Text: Sexually transmitted infections are the leading cause of infertility and often have no symptoms.

- **ADVANCING AGE**

Graphic: Baby's bottle in the shape of an hourglass.

Headline: ADVANCING AGE DECREASES YOUR ABILITY TO HAVE CHILDREN.

Text: While women and their partners must be the ones to decide when (and if) to have children, women in their twenties and thirties are most likely to conceive.

- **UNHEALTHY BODY WEIGHT**

Graphic: Baby's bottle with a measuring tape squeezing it tight in the middle.

Headline: AN UNHEALTHY BODY WEIGHT MAY PREVENT YOU FROM HAVING CHILDREN.

Text: Low body weight and obesity can cause infertility.

Each slide features the tagline "Your decisions now can impact your ability to conceive in the future. GET THE FACTS." They also include a toll-free number (866-228-6906) for more information and the campaign's web address, www.ProtectYourFertility.org. The rejected mall PSA featured similar graphics and text.

Viacom Outdoor, the company that places advertising in shopping malls in over 200 American markets, said "mall managements are very particular when it comes to ads in their facilities." They prefer "mall friendly" and "happy environment" graphics. Similarly, AMC theaters declined the PSAs because they had "no entertainment value." When asked what changes could be made to make the PSAs acceptable, a company official responded that they did not want this type of advertising on screen.

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The American Society for Reproductive Medicine is a nonprofit membership organization devoted advancing the art, science and practice of reproductive medicine. ASRM is the nation's largest professional organization of fertility experts.