Dead Celebrities and Smoking

By ACSH Staff — September 26, 2003

Last month, a company called Freedom Tobacco International, Inc. offered celebrities lifetime supplies of their cigarettes and paid women to smoke the brand in hip Manhattan bars and nightclubs in an effort to draw attention to the brand.

One group of celebrities they won't be able to recruit, though, are the many celebrity smokers who have already passed away, and today brings word that rock star Robert Palmer has just joined their ranks, in Paris at the age of fifty-four (Palmer sang such hits as "Addicted to Love" and "Simply Irresistible"). As with Los Angeles Times reporter Mark Fineman, who died of a heart attack in Iraq three days earlier at the age of fifty-one, we cannot be sure that smoking was the cause of Palmer's death, but as ACSH's book Cigarettes: What the Warning Label Doesn't Tell You notes, smokers are about two to four times more likely to develop cardiovascular disease, 70% more likely than non-smokers to die from it, and prone to die about a decade earlier from it than non-smokers (some say a smoker is more likely to survive a given heart attack than a non-smoker, but this is due to smokers' heart attacks beginning at an earlier age). Smoking affects more than just lungs, though that is bad enough.

Hollywood stars and rock singers are notorious for hard living, but very few die in a fashion as sensational as heroin overdose or in the midst of a drunken binge while trashing a hotel room. The more familiar, mundane and therefore generally more socially accepted scourge of cigarettes claims far more, adding the occasional luminous star to the walk of shame on which the bodies of some 4 million smokers a year are piled.

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I think that it is simply atrocious that these movie stars would let money be their god instead of their guide. They know perfectly well what they are doing is a grave disservice to these kids who are so vulnerable. The kids see their favorite star smoking and they think it's the norm of society. They must not realize that hundreds of movie stars have died from smoking-related illnesses.

Chavasol