

Anti-Tobacco Activists Target Film Poster

CHENNAI: Anti-tobacco activists have slammed the makers of Tamil movie 'Kanchana 2' for putting up posters of the hero smoking a cigarette in a promotional campaign across the city.

Tamil Nadu People's Forum for Tobacco Control (TNPFTC), in a letter to the state health department, said the posters violate the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003, which bans depiction of tobacco products in, among other things, promotional material for films.

TNPFTC state convener Cyril Alexander said the organisation has reported violations in the promotion campaigns for least 12 films in the past year. "Regional movies, especially Tamil films, have a long record of violating the COPTA Act. It goes on to show that despite repeated reminders the rules are not taken seriously," Alexander said. The forum organisation has also sent letters expressing its concerns to the film director, producer and the actor.

The forum last year took exception to excessive promotion of cigarettes in Tamil film 'Velaiyilla Pattathari'.

"Every time we write to the health department, officials send notices to the filmmakers, but there's no further action after that," Alexander said. Violations include films with illegible anti-tobacco advisories and others with no advisories whatsoever when an actor smokes on screen. "Films should ideally have an audio-visual disclaimer by the hero that cautions viewers against smoking," Alexander said.

Indian Dental Association, Chennai, secretary Dr Thamizhchelvan H said it is important to make actors aware of their responsibility as role models who can unconsciously encourage youngsters to smoke or make a serious effort to warn them of the ill-effects of smoking.

"They need to realise they hold a responsible position. There are so many people who look up to them and emulate them," he said. "The actor should be able to stand up and

say no to such scenes."

While oral and lung cancer are among the many outcomes of smoking, Dr Thamizhchelvan said he is increasingly coming across youngsters with oral submucous fibrosis, a precancerous condition that causes the jaws to become rigid.

Surgical oncologist Dr Arvind Krishnamurthy said studies in other countries have showed that regulations in movies can lead to fewer youngsters picking up the habit. "Unfortunately for us, although our regulations are strong, implementation remains poor,' he said.