truth initiative
INSPIRING TOBACCO-FREE LIVES
why video games?

✓ 56% of teens aged 13-18 play video, computer or mobile games on any given day

✓ Teens who play games average two hours and 25 minutes per day

✓ Overall, teens spend more time per day on average playing video, computer or mobile games than using social media

Source: Common Sense. The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Teens and Tweens. 2015.
potential impact

• May contribute to the perception that smoking is common.
  - Research has found that youth who perceive smoking in media are more likely to smoke.

• May be considered free advertising for tobacco companies.
  - Research has shown that advertising is a key factor in youth tobacco use initiation.

“I mean of course it was very influential because you were seeing it over and over. It’s described as cool. It’s described as something that grown-ups do, strong men, people who have things in life, careers, things like that. So it did really affect me.”
the research

• There is little scientific research to date on the impact of tobacco use in video games on youth smoking rates.

• A solid body of research demonstrates that exposure to smoking in movies increases the likelihood that a young person will begin to smoke.
  ▪ 44% of adolescents who start smoking do so because of smoking images they have seen in the movies.

• Teens spend more time playing video games than they do going out to watch a movie.

Current knowledge about tobacco use in video games
1. Tobacco use is widespread in video games played by youth

- A 2012 study found a steady increase over a decade in tobacco content in video games rated appropriate for kids as young as 10.
  - Of all new games introduced in 2011 that were rated “Everyone 10+”, nearly 13% featured tobacco.
- The same study found that between 1994 and 2011, 60 out of 78 large publishers included tobacco imagery in at least one, and often more, of their games rated appropriate for youth.¹

“Yeah, I’ve noticed it in a ton of video games that people are always like smoking cigarettes or cigars or something like that.”

In *Starcraft II: Wings of Liberty*, a popular battlefield video game rated “Teen,” three of the 13 featured soldiers smoke. In addition, the only characters in the game who are capable of doing certain tasks are shown holding a lit cigarette either in their mouths or behind their ears.
2. Tobacco use is presented in positive ways

• Tobacco use is often glamorized in video games

• Respondents in the Truth Interviews described smoking characters as:
  ➢ Cool
  ➢ Badass
  ➢ Tough
  ➢ Strong
  ➢ Gritty
  ➢ Leader
  ➢ Important

  "He’d be smoking a cigar, and it kind of made him look more important and more in charge, you know. He was the cool-looking dude, and he’s smoking this big cigar, and he’s giving orders to his people."

• Many young adult respondents revealed that, when they were younger, viewing smoking in video games made them want to smoke.
overwatch
3. many games feature playable characters that smoke

- Unlike when people watch movies and observe tobacco use, many games include playable characters that smoke.
  - In *Grand Theft Auto*, a player can buy cigarettes and have the character smoke them.
  - In *Call of Duty: Black Ops III*, the player hasn’t even started the game before there is an initial interaction with the protagonist, who is smoking a cigar while cleaning a gun.

Call of Duty: Black Ops 3
Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cfqb1PgPhQI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cfqb1PgPhQI)
call of duty: black ops III
4. Game descriptors often fail to mention tobacco use

- This makes it tough for parents to monitor games for tobacco imagery
  - Findings from a 2015 survey of ratings and video gamer recall revealed there was verified tobacco content in 42% of video games that participants reported playing;
  - But only 8% of these games received tobacco warnings from the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).

“Parents and adults should recognize that many video games contain tobacco use and be aware that ESRB content descriptors may fail to mention tobacco content, even when it is present in a game.”
The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) assigns ratings to video games. It also provides descriptions of the content that factored into each game’s rating and interactive elements.

- Content descriptors are not meant to be an exhaustive list.

Two different rating processes are used, depending on the game’s platform:

- Package/boxed video games
- Digitally delivered games
overwatch

MCCREE

http://overwatch.wikia.com/wiki/McCree
Overwatch

Platform: Windows PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One

Rating Category: T

Content Descriptors: Blood, Use of Tobacco, Violence

Other: Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB (Windows PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One)

Rating Summary: This is a first-person shooter in which players join an international task force trying to restore peace to the world. Players use a variety of firearms (e.g., pistols, machine guns), arrows, and futuristic weapons (e.g., laser blasters) to attack enemies in team combat objectives. Combat is frenetic with realistic gunfire, cries of pain, and explosions. Splashes of blood briefly appear with each successful hit. One character is depicted smoking a cigar.

Will it list tobacco on the ESRB web site?
Call of Duty: Black Ops III

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

Rating Category: M

Content Descriptors: Blood and Gore, Drug Reference, Intense Violence, Strong Language Tobacco??

Other: Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360)

Rating Summary: This is a first-person shooter in which players assume the role of a futuristic military unit attempting to thwart the plans of a cartel. Players use machine guns, pistols, shotguns, grenade launchers, and various “cybercore” abilities (e.g., drone control, confusion for human enemies) to kill robots and soldiers amid futuristic urban environments. Action is frenetic, with frequent gunfire, explosions, cries of pain, and blood-splatter effects. Some attacks allow players to blow up enemies or blow off their arms or legs. A handful of cutscenes depict figures being beaten, tortured, or stabbed; some stabbings are depicted fairly close up. During the course of the game, players can select emblems from a menu screen for character/team customization; a few emblems are suggestive of marijuana. The words “f*ck” and “sh*t” appear in the dialogue.
THE FUTURE HAS BEEN ALTERED
SHORTLY AFTER KILLING MENENDEZ, THE CORDIS DIE REVOLT BEGAN
THE GOOD MEN AND WOMEN OF THE PLANET ROSE UP AGAINST
THE MILITARY. AGENTS SECTION AND HARPER ARE TASKED WITH
HUNTING DOWN AND KILLING THE REVOLT’S LEADER, RAUL’S SON.
JOINING THEM IS NEW RECRUIT NARCUS, KODU’S SON. WITH
TIME ON THE CLOCK AND THE WORLD AGAINST THEM, THE TRIO MUST
SURVIVE WAVE AFTER WAVE OF MILITIA AS THEY HOPE TO END IT ALL.

MULTIPLAYER
CAMPAIGN
ZOMBIES
HUEKETOWN 2059

MULTIPLAYER
CAMPAIGN
ZOMBIES
HUEKETOWN 2059

MULTIPLAYER RETURNED BIGGER AND
MORE WITH NEW MODES AND GUNS

FACE THE COMING DISASTER COMES BACK
REVEALING MORE BLOOD TERROR IN THE
HUEKETOWN 2059 IS
RETURNED FOR THE NEW
GENERATION WITH
NEW FEATURES

IMP and ZM DLC included free

WARNING

Use of the PlayStation Network is subject to the PlayStation Network Terms of Service, and your Agreement and applicable privacy policy. Please see www.us.playstation.com/privacy/for more information. Children under 13 must have adult consent to establish a PlayStation Network Account and will not be able to access certain content, games, PlayStation Network features and offerings may change without notice.

PlayStation Network

www.us.playstation.com

Sony Computer Entertainment America

919 East Hillsdale Blvd., Foster City, CA 94404

MATURE
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Sexual Themes

www.epa.org

ERB CONTENT RATING

MATURE 17+

Access to certain features requires a PlayStation Network account and an Online Pass voucher (included). Online Pass voucher may be redeemed only and becomes associated with the subscription identification account used to purchase. Online Pass requires a PS3™™ system with internet access. Online Pass cannot be transferred, resold, or redeemed for cash or credit. Terms and conditions available at www.playstation.com/cps2/asa/onlinepass.html. SCEA reserves the right to remove the online portion of this game at any time. Online play and downloads, including content updates, may require a broadband internet connection, 500MB free hard drive space, and may incur other fees and third-party subscription costs. Activision is a trademark of Activision Publishing, Inc. DTS, Inc. "Dolby" and the double-D symbol are trademarks of Dolby Laboratories.

Developed by (Developer Name); Licensed for distribution in North and South America on the PS3 system. Manufactured and printed in the U.S.A. "Blue-ray Disc" and "Blu-ray Disc" logos are trademarks. ©2009 Sony Computer Entertainment America LLC. All rights reserved.
Gaps in knowledge
what we don’t know

- Actual prevalence of smoking in video games
  - A methodical review of games in the US market has not been conducted
  - A 2012 paper is based information on information from ESRB, which has previously underreported tobacco imagery
- Relationship between playing video games and smoking, particularly among US adolescents
  - Existing studies do not look specifically at the relationship, show no relationship, have inconsistent findings, or only consider adults
Action needed
The ESRB needs to be better at identifying games that contain tobacco use.

- If a game has tobacco in it in any way then it should automatically result in a “Mature” rating.
game developers

• Game makers should stop including tobacco use and tobacco images in their games
  ➢ Particularly those marketed to or played by youth
• Stop using tobacco use as a crutch to make characters appear “tough” or “badass”

The Wolf Among Us
http://fables.wikia.com/wiki/Special:Videos
researchers

- Conduct more studies of the relationship between video games and tobacco.
  - Particularly longitudinal studies to determine if exposure leads to increased use or facilitates progression to smoking
- Answer the question: Does exposure to tobacco in video games lead to increased tobacco use?

"I mean of course it was very influential because you were seeing it over and over. It's described as cool. It's described as something that grown-ups do, strong men, people who have things in life, careers, things like that. So it did really affect me."
public health advocates and policymakers

- Build awareness of tobacco use in video games and support research to learn more about its implications and communicate concerns with game developers and publishers
  - Some research suggests that tobacco content in video games suitable for youth increased during the period of time that tobacco use decreased in movies
- Encourage responsible industry practices
Thank you

ehair@truthinitiative.org