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Rising teen smoking under fire

R.J. Reynolds denies it'll drop out of settlement

WASHINGTON (AP) — Armed with new evidence that teen smoking is on the increase, the White House told Congress on Thursday it wants tougher anti-tobacco legislation and a key Republican implored cigarette companies to go along or get rolled over.

Alarm waves raced through Washington on tobacco critics' claims that R.J. Reynolds was pulling out of the proposed settlement that had formed the basis for congressional legislation. By afternoon, the company vehemently denied it planned to do so.

The furious activity came one day after an unprecedented bill designed to curb tobacco use by teenagers — and simultaneously raise hundreds of billions of dollars for the government — was approved by a Senate committee.

The Clinton administration urged Congress to quickly enact even tougher legislation, announcing that a startling 43 percent of the nation's high school students already use tobacco and that teen smoking is rising steadily.

"Tobacco companies are doing all they can to make you kids into fu-

Gore told junior high school students Thursday. "We need to put in place tough financial penalties" to fight that.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who authored the Senate bill, warned at a hastily called news conference that if tobacco companies that don't cooperate with the legislation could face "less than pleasant" alternatives.

RJR said Thursday it still stands by the proposed settlement negotiated last year with 40 states. But "the McCain bill does not reflect the same intent as that agreement," said spokeswoman Peggy Carter.

The bickering almost obscured a new government report saying that tobacco use among teens is increasing dramatically. Among the findings by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- 48.2 percent of all teen-age boys and over a third of all girls smoke either cigarettes or cigars or chew tobacco.

- Cigarette smoking jumped from 34.8 percent of high school students in 1995 to 36.4 percent last year.

- Smoking has doubled among black teen boys since 1991 — 22.7 percent of them smoked last year. Smoking increased by 54 percent among black females, to 17.4 percent. Doctors bemoaned those increases, saying low rates of black teen smokers had been hailed as a national success story.

- One in five students had

Teen smoking

The number of teen-age smokers is steadily rising. A look at teen tobacco use and cigarette use by race and gender:

Tobacco use in 1997:

Includes cigarettes, cigars and chewing tobacco

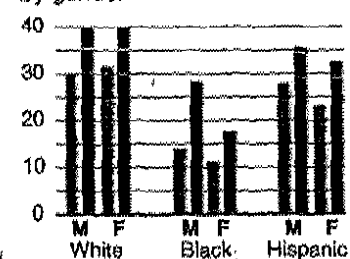


Cigarette use:

By race



By gender



Source: Centers for Disease

AP

'We Card' teens training sessions offered in state

For the Tribune

HELENA — Five state trade associations representing thousands of retailers, wholesalers, grocers, taverns and restaurants announced Thursday the launch of a statewide training initiative designed to educate their employees about preventing underage tobacco sales.

The group, known as the Montana Coalition for Responsible Tobacco Retailing, will hold a series of "We Card" training sessions in Great Falls and Billings.

The nationally recognized "We Card" training sessions will teach retail employees how to request identification, spot a fake ID, to reject sales to minors and to handle difficult customers. Retailers will also learn about state and federal sales and carding laws.

Training sessions are scheduled for the following dates and locations:

- Great Falls: 9-11 a.m., Wednesday, Best Western Heritage Inn.
- Billings: 9-11 a.m., Thursday, Sheraton.

Interested retailers can register for the free seminars by calling (888) 872-4603.