MPAA member companies had a year to solve Hollywood’s most toxic problem. Only a few days remain.

Nine decades after Big Tobacco started exploiting movies, we gave the major studios a year to start R-rating movies with smoking. It wasn’t their first chance:

2003 The studios first heard the R-rating for smoking proposed fifteen years ago, at a special Los Angeles briefing attended by the major studios’ production chiefs, state Attorneys General, and health researchers. The studios took no action.

2007 Harvard School of Public Health, commissioned by the MPAA to recommend a solution to the risks posed by on-screen smoking, tells the studios to “take effective action to eliminate depictions of tobacco smoking from films accessible to children and youths, and take leadership and credit for doing so.” The studios didn’t do it.

2009 Thirty-three state Attorneys General told the studios, “It is clear that every time the industry releases another movie that depicts smoking, it does so with the full knowledge of the deadly harm it will bring to children who watch it.” By this time, the MPAA claimed that it “considered” smoking as a rating factor. But MPAA/NATO’s official Rating Rules didn’t even mention tobacco or smoking—and they still don’t.

2012 The US Surgeon General concluded, in the strongest possible language, that exposure to on-screen smoking “causes” young people to start smoking and reported that an R-rating would reduce youth smoking.

2014 The US Surgeon General reports that R-rating future movies with tobacco imagery can be expected to reduce youth smoking by 18 percent. The CDC projects the R-rating would avert one million future tobacco deaths among US children alive today.

2016 The World Health Organization (the UN’s health arm) advised 180 countries and territories party to the global Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the world’s first health treaty, that to stop tobacco promotion they must address entertainment products, including films. Policy tools include adult film ratings and making media productions with tobacco ineligible for public subsidies.

2017 Reacting to a CDC report that the US film industry, as a whole, had made no progress against toxic tobacco content since 2010, US medical and public health groups started a one-year countdown for the industry to adopt the R-rating for future films with smoking. The June 1, 2018, deadline is now just days away.

On-screen smoking is toxic to kids. It’s reasonable and effective to update the film industry’s voluntary ratings to protect kids’ lives—not preserve the deadly status quo. R-rate future films with smoking, except those that exclusively depict smoking by actual people who smoked (as in documentaries and biopics) or that realistically depict the health consequences of tobacco use.