

Buck Big Tobacco

Rodeos are for families, not Big Tobacco! Take it to the streets and protest the tobacco industry and brand sponsorship at rodeos. This activity is an example of “Take it to the Streets” from the KBD guide, and features an annual event organized by OK SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco) protesting U.S. Smokeless Tobacco’s (UST) sponsorship of the Bullnanza rodeo in Oklahoma.

Age Group: middle school, high school and above

Number Participants: 15 – 100 or more

Preparation Time: 4-6 weeks planning, 3-4 hours day of event

Resources: Signs, palm cards, gear, t-shirts, cars and a hearse if you have the resources

Cost: up to \$200 for the event supplies (if you plan on renting a hearse) and gas money for each driver

“UST is ruining Oklahoma's western heritage by pushing their deadly product in our rodeos. Let the PRCA (Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association) know we want our rodeos to be for families NOT tobacco.”

Koorosh Zahrai, 18, Edmond, OK

The PRCA is one of the rodeo's biggest bull riding associations, which means that many families and young people attend these rodeos to watch the biggest names in the sport of bull riding. Bullnanza is one of the shows in this tour stops around the country, including Oklahoma. UST is one of the PRCA's largest sponsors. They cover the inside of the arena with signs, posters and sponsor competitions. They even name bulls after UST products and sponsor individual riders. This is a huge marketing opportunity for UST to brand its product as being rugged and part of the rodeo culture and western heritage way of life.

SWAT is a regular protester at this Bullnanza event, asking for the PRCA to voluntarily adopt a policy stating it will no longer accept money from UST or any tobacco company. Because these events are family oriented, SWAT asked that the PRCA instead ask its other major sponsors to replace the sponsorship money from UST to keep a safe environment for the young people at these events.

The purpose of this activity is to draw attention to events in which tobacco companies are the primary sponsors – especially for youth and family oriented events like rodeos. OK SWAT organized a mobile demonstration and a street team to get the word out. Since there was no space nearby to reserve for a demonstration, this approach was a good alternative. It gave SWAT members an opportunity to get information out to the public and provided a great visual for the media.

SWAT rented a hearse and SWAT members drove their cars in a mock funeral procession following the hearse around the event location honking horns, and holding up signs. The hearse and the cars were covered with anti-big tobacco messaging. SWAT had 15-30 cars in the procession with the hearse symbolizing the death caused by tobacco use, specifically spit tobacco. During this procession, street teams walked around wearing event t-shirts and passed out palm cards with more information about spit tobacco and the UST sponsorship of the rodeo. The cards also included contact information for the PRCA and encouraged fans to ask them to stop taking money from Big Tobacco.

“On the palm cards I designed we had our messaging on one side and on the other, a letter to the commissioner of the PRCA asking for them to drop the sponsorship from UST. The palm card acted as a post card that the general public could use to take action.”
Koorosh Zahrai, 18, Edmond, OK

Suggested timeline:

3-4 weeks out:

- Contact group members and notify them of upcoming event. Make sure as many volunteers as possible will be able to drive their cars in the procession.
- Talk to your group advisor about any release forms that might be necessary for volunteers to travel in others' cars.
- Start brainstorming key messages, palm cards, posters and other props. Visit www.nstep.org, the National Spit Tobacco Education Program, for important facts about spit tobacco to include in your materials.

2-3 weeks out:

- Rent a hearse at any limo company.
- Draft a press advisory, release and any other press materials to notify the media of your event and to have on site for any media that attend. See the “Getting Noticed” section in your KBD guide for tips.
- Design your palm cards, posters, t-shirts and whatever other props you decide to include.

1 week out:

- Send out your press advisory or release.
- Follow-up by calling and emailing media outlets the day before your event to remind them and continue to pitch them to cover your event.
- Finish any posters, banners or last minute props.
- Make sure everyone has an assignment for the event. Remember, you need drivers, passengers to hold signs, and a street team to handout palm cards, hold posters and banners, and talk to the fans around the event.
- Don't forget to have a few group representatives as designated media contacts. They should be prepared with copies of your press materials (press kits) and should practice talking points ahead of time so they are prepared for any interviews.

Event Day:

- Decorate your cards with signs and your key messages and organize your cars in order behind the hearse. It will probably be helpful to designate a meeting place nearby with a large parking lot to get your procession ready.
- When the cars are ready to go, send out your street team and start circling around the event. Have fun!

Interested in more? Check out the rest of your **KBD CR-ROM** and kickbuttsday.org to find out more about the fight against tobacco and what youth advocates across the country are doing to take action.