



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Government and Industry should work in partnership to tackle obesity

Responding to the Government's Obesity Strategy, announced today, **Baroness Buscombe, Chief Executive of the Advertising Association**, said:

"Obesity is a hugely important and multi-faceted social issue that must be taken seriously. The increase in obesity can be attributed to a complex range of inter-relating causal factors including changes in lifestyle and diet and social, environmental and cultural factors, as the Government's Foresight Report on obesity recently acknowledged. Tackling obesity is about behavioural change. This is why the Government, industry and stakeholders need to work in partnership on initiatives to improve the health of the nation.

"The advertising industry has already responded constructively by working with Ofcom and the Advertising Standards Authority on a new regulatory framework for food advertising and new rules are in place for the advertising of food products on television and in other media. The ASA's recently published Food and Soft Drink Advertising Survey 2007 demonstrates that there has been a very high compliance rate (99.2%) with the new codes and significantly no ads breached the new rules.

"The advertising industry is acutely aware of the importance of safe, responsible standards and the ASA advertising self-regulatory system is robust, effective and independently administered. The CAP code it administers is self-regulatory but binding on all parties. Self-regulation is clearly the best approach to regulating advertising."

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Notes to editors:

1. Ofcom's comprehensive and evidence-based research in July 2004 concluded that advertising has "*modest direct effect*" on children's food choices, and that there was a case for proportionate and targeted action (this resulted in new food advertising content and scheduling rules announced by Ofcom in February 2007). However, Ofcom said its independent research showed that multiple factors (social, environmental and cultural) account for childhood obesity, and that a total ban on food advertising would be neither proportionate nor, in isolation, effective.
2. The Government's recommendations on advertising only comprised three of the ninety one recommendations in the Government's 2004 *Choosing Health* White Paper.
3. The Advertising Association's Food Advertising Unit report (September 2007) on changes in food and soft drink advertising and promotions since 2003, published ahead of the Government's interim review. The report clearly demonstrates that there has been significant change in the nature and balance of food advertising to children between 2003 and 2006 – even before the new rules were introduced this year - with a downward trend in exposure by children to this advertising.
4. In December 2007 Ofcom's six-month assessment of the impact of the new food advertising rules showed a 27% reduction in commercial impacts for the under tens and within children's airtime a 57% drop since 2005. Although too early to come to firm conclusions, this is a clear sign that the new rules are having the intended effect of reducing the exposure of children to food advertising on television.
5. The ASA regularly monitors advertising communications, in addition to adjudicating on complaints. The ASA has published the findings of its Food and Soft Drink Advertising Survey 2007. This follows a monitoring exercise undertaken by the ASA's Compliance team in July 2007 to measure the compliance rate of food advertisements with new tightened content rules. The report reveals an extremely high compliance rate, with 99.2% of ads surveyed deemed to be compliant with the Advertising Codes. Significantly, no ads breached the new food rules. The Compliance team assessed 292 television advertisements, seven direct mailings, 20 online advertisements, 33 posters, 377 press advertisements, three cinema advertisements and 27 circulars. Only two television advertisements of 292 breached the BCAP Television Code (0.7%). Only four of 467 non-broadcast advertisements breached the CAP Code (0.9%). The ASA says that the results show that the food and soft drink advertising industry has successfully understood and acted upon the new rules.