

Speakers pan tobacco firms

Tobacco companies got a roasting from North Canterbury children at the grand final of a regional speech competition in Kaiapoi.

Speech champions from five schools took part in the competition – part of a Cancer Society campaign to protect children from tobacco marketing.

Luke Kobussen of Kaiapoi North took the title. The other finalists were Rita Giles (Clarkville), Alexia McKay (St Patricks), Tawera Tamepo (Kaiapoi Borough) and Georgia Medder (West Eyreton).

Luke said the tobacco industry was trying to brainwash young people that smoking was OK.

“Smoking sucks and is lethal” and the “death sticks” need to be moved away from places where children could see them, he said.

Alexia said cigarette companies were targeting kids as young as 11. She was concerned cigarettes were displayed in dairies “next to the milk and at eye level”.

“Before you pick that killer up think hard – do I want to die young?”

Rita told the audience, which included six MPs, smoking was even more addictive than heroin.

She said young people were more vulnerable than adults, and the “calculated marketing” of tobacco companies targeted teenagers with “cunning, clever, visual strategies”.

Georgia said the Cancer Society’s Out of Sight Out of Mind campaign could be the last chance to save many young New Zealanders. The society is advocating a law change to get tobacco in retail outlets placed behind closed drawers under

counters.



CHAMPION: Luke Kobussen of Kaiapoi North School was judged the winner in the final of the speech competition.

“Medical scare tactics of anti-smoking campaigners are not working,” Georgia said.

The “hundreds of tiny boxes of death” should be moved “out of sight, out of mind, out of my life”.

The Cancer Society claims the average age of starting to smoke in New Zealand is 14. Nearly a quarter (23%) of youth smokers start before they turn 10.

For more information on the campaign, go to www.protectionchildren.org.nz.



NO PRESSURE: Tawera Tamepo of Kaiapoi Borough School delivers his speech to an audience including six MPs.

Photos: GEOFF MEIN

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