Scary anti-smoking ads prompt 100,000-plus to kick habit

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Want a smoker to quit? Scare, shock or disgust him. That's what the U.S. government did with its first federally funded anti-smoking ad campaign and, new data suggest, it worked.

An estimated 1.6 million Americans tried to quit and at least 100,000 likely succeeded as a result of graphic ads that showed how real ex-smokers had suffered paralysis, stroke, lung removal, heart attacks and limb amputations, according to a study Monday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The first round of ads ran from March through May in 2012, followed by a second one this past spring. A third round is planned for next year.

The CDC created the startling ads after consulting with smokers, who urged it to make the statistics about smoking — that it's the leading cause of preventable death and that it shortens life expectancy by 10 years — real. So it focused on the effects of smoking-related disease rather than the risk of death.

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