

Opinion: Casino giants' problem gambling efforts are shoddy

By Steve Friess, Las Vegas Sun

A few years ago during Responsible Gaming Education Week, every MGM Resorts employee was required to wear an orange wristband that read: "Keep It Fun." At lunch with an MGM executive that week, I needled him about how ridiculous the gesture was, only to have him scold my skepticism. Plastic jewelry, he insisted, was important to raising awareness of problem gambling, and the company seriously wants to help problem gamblers.

That encounter sprang to mind this month after I strayed accidentally into the "responsible gaming" section of the Monte Carlo website, was quite appalled, and then took an extensive and damning inventory of how major casinos handle this matter online. Then, I watched with sadness as some of the Strip's mouthpieces went into damage-control mode rather than soul-searching mode upon the April 14 release of a credible \$3 million study that found gambling addiction is twice as common as alcoholism.

This is an era in which gambling – casino or otherwise – has never been easier. The shutdown in recent days in the U.S. of the world's biggest poker websites amid a federal indictment will make playing online temporarily more challenging, but there's also legislation in Carson City to allow mobile gaming devices to be taken to private places such as hotel rooms. So I find the industry's sincerity questionable.

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