



Research

Tobacco Web

Smoking and tobacco related issues

Smoking keeps the tobacco industry in business. Throughout most of the 20th Century, the tobacco industry publicly argued that nicotine was not addictive, that the link between cancer and smoking was not proven, and that the industry had not sought to recruit young people to smoking. However, the release since 1994 of thousands of previously secret internal tobacco industry documents shows that the industry in fact knew that nicotine was addictive, that there were strong links between smoking and cancer and that the recruitment of young smokers was critical to the industry's future viability.

The release of the documents resulted in a number of public concessions by the industry. It conceded that there are "significant health risks associated with smoking" and that nicotine is addictive. However, despite strong evidence to the contrary, it continues to deny the importance of the "youth market" to its future. It also continues to publicly deny the well-established links between passive smoking and ill health.

We believe the following information belies the industry's previous and current statements on a range of smoking related issues as well as providing an insight into its history of duplicity and deception.

The industry and the health effects of smoking

In 1962 and 1964 two landmark reports on the health effects of smoking were released by the (UK) Royal College of Physicians and the US Surgeon General. The reports concluded that smoking caused lung cancer, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, cardio-vascular disease and a range of other cancers. Yet, it was not until the 1994 release of previously secret documents by industry whistleblowers and due to the requirements of a series of U.S. legal decisions that the industry began to acknowledge smoking's health effects. Even now however, despite overwhelming scientific evidence, it would appear that the industry is at pains to play down the issue.

The industry and passive smoking

Publicly, the tobacco industry has always denied that passive smoking causes ill health. However, the recent release of previously confidential tobacco industry documents in the United States has shown that as early as the 1970s the tobacco industry itself had conducted research that supported the conclusion that environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) was dangerous to health. For example, research undertaken by the British American Tobacco Company (BAT) confirmed the presence of nitrosamines (which are potent cancer causing agents) and glycoproteins (a class of proteins that often cause allergic reactions) in ETS. Also, BAT research reports had implied that sidestream smoke was "biologically active" and therefore potentially carcinogenic.

The tobacco industry has misled the public about the scientific evidence on ETS. In Australia, in a 1991 Federal Court of Australia decision, the Tobacco Institute of Australia was found to have contravened the Trade Practices Act by publishing misleading or deceptive statements that said:

"there is little evidence and nothing that proves scientifically that cigarette smoke causes disease in non-smokers."

With the accumulation of evidence on the harmful effects of ETS, the community has come to accept—and expect—smoking restrictions. The tobacco industry's response has been to undertake sustained campaigns to delay the introduction of public smoking restrictions. These campaigns have involved:

- political lobbying and donations
- the funding of "smokers' rights" groups
- forging alliances in the media and with sections of the hospitality industry.

Addiction

The tobacco industry has long sought to maximise the addictive potential of its product. In the production of cigarettes, a number of methods have been used to do this. Among others, these include:

- the use of high-nicotine tobaccos and highernicotine parts of the tobacco leaf to raise nicotine concentrations
- the addition of ammonia compounds which has the effect of speeding the delivery of nicotine to the smoker's brain (the companies claim this process is done to enhance "taste")





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- the use of psychoactive chemicals (e.g. acetaldehyde and pyridine) which act synergistically to strengthen nicotine's effects on the brain and central nervous system.

The industry's public position on tobacco and addiction has been similar to that on the health effects of smoking. Until recently it publicly denied the addictiveness of nicotine in the full knowledge that it is, in fact, highly addictive. The following 1963 quote from a tobacco industry representative is illustrative of this deceit.

"Moreover, nicotine is addictive. We are, then, in the business of selling nicotine, an addictive drug effective in the release of stress mechanisms."

It was not until the release of previously secret documents revealing the industry's depth of knowledge of the addictive qualities of nicotine that it began to publicly acknowledge this. Yet again, as the following quote from the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company demonstrates, in public the industry continues to play the issue down.

"Although smoking can be very difficult to quit, we do not believe that the term "addiction" should be used to imply that there is anything in cigarette smoke that prevents smokers from reaching and implementing a decision to quit."

Recruiting the young

"Realistically, if our company is to survive and prosper, over the long term, we must get our share of the youth market ..."

Dr C Teague of the tobacco company R.J. Reynolds in 1973.

Publicly the industry has always claimed that it has not sought to recruit young people to smoking. Some companies have even established "youth smoking prevention programs". However the following comment from an American tobacco industry executive - who at the time of writing was in Australia working for the Philip Morris subsidiary Kraft - on how best to "disrupt" funding for a large community-based youth anti-smoking program seems to reveal the real intention of these industry programs.

"Also, as a major goal of ASSIST is to reduce youth incidence, the tobacco industry could also offer our own youth initiatives with the Tobacco Helping Youth Say No, and the COURSE Consortium, (once a curriculum is developed) and suggest that further Federal or state funding is not needed for youth anti-smoking campaigns. I believe that these are the most effective means of disrupting ASSIST."

(emphasis added)

