

News analysis

China: marathon event runs on green ribbon power

A new health initiative has got off to a busy start in Xiamen, a subtropical island off the south east coast of China, directly across from Taiwan. Based at the university of Xiamen, it was born out of discussions I had with students about my work with the BADvertising institute, which I started in the late 1980s in the USA. BADvertising (<http://www.badvertising.org/>) uses the power of art and humour to try to counter tobacco promotion, and support other tobacco control measures. Having learned about the situation in China and the dire predictions of future Chinese tobacco deaths during the world conference in Beijing in 1997, I had decided to come to teach in China, and to do something to help. Now, having learned about my past experience of control work, the students decided they wanted to do something similar.

First, we conducted several awareness-raising activities about the problems caused by smoking, about which there is still comparatively little knowledge in China; about 40% of male doctors still smoke, and half seem not to know that smoking can kill. We could not come up with a good translation for BADvertising, and trying to create an organisation turned out to be difficult and time-consuming, so we decided to bypass the paperwork and just get on with the work. As a loosely-knit group of students, teachers and community members, we made bookmarks, flyers and posters, gave slide shows and conducted a letter-writing campaign to loved-ones who smoked, and in the process received much interest and support from the media.

At the end of last year, the students started a BADvertising "English corner" to attract students who were interested in improving their English, and at the same time offer information on the harmfulness of smoking and second-hand smoke. It led to the name Green



Students in Xiamen, China are helping to raise awareness about the health problems caused by smoking.

Breathing (Lu Si Hu Xi) and produced contacts to help set up an official organisation.

The mission of the Green Breathing Association is to work for a healthier China by educating the public about the harm of secondhand smoke, empowering passive smokers to protect themselves and their loved ones, and promoting the benefits of smoke-free environments. We use people's interest in learning English as a way of attracting those who would not normally pay any attention to the topic of smoking, and we give our members a hands-on opportunity to use their English to make a real contribution to society.

In March each year, Xiamen hosts an international marathon, and although officially recognised too late for long term planning, the group was given permission to do something along the route. With help from several large and more established environmental organisations, we made banners, posters and petitions in support of a smoke-free zone at the marathon, hoping that the media would help get the word out. Unfortunately, no support was forthcoming. One factor possibly connected was that a major sponsor of the marathon was the Seven Wolves clothing company, better known to many as the Seven Wolves tobacco company.

Eventually, we publicised the plans ourselves, using text messages and other means, asking people to honour and enjoy the smoke-free zone, and to wear something green to show their support. We had no time or money for Green Breathing T-shirts, but instead made hundreds of twisted pieces of green ribbon similar to those used to mark campaigns associated with other campaigns. They were highly popular, and we even pinned them on the security guards who came to check on our activities. We began to realise just how helpless and oppressed non-smokers have felt in China. By declaring themselves as smoke-free zones, people can claim their right to smoke-free air without having to personally confront anyone, something to be avoided at all costs in China.



A promotional airship for the Chinese tobacco company Seven Wolves, sponsors of the Xiamen international marathon.

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Despite many difficulties in operating among the crowds present at the marathon itself, the green ribbons and petitions were welcomed enthusiastically and received much media coverage. Subsequently, it has been reported on television that the marathon committee is seriously considering making the marathon smoke-free next year, and even divesting itself of tobacco company sponsors. As if in a show of strength, Seven Wolves flew a large promotional airship all over Xiamen for the week following the marathon.

Future tasks of the group include trying to help Xiamen university to go smoke-free, but already there are signs that the influence of tobacco interests may first have to be overcome. At a prestigious concert featuring many famous singers on campus recently, the Seven Wolves company was in evidence. But offers started coming in from pro-health allies, including a well known singer and a TV personality. Now the expanding group is redoubling its work towards a smoke-free China.

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Lebanon: business as usual

In December 2005 Lebanon ratified the World Health Organization's Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC) with little fanfare by the government and no coverage by the local media, and so far it seems that the tobacco industry is behaving just as it did before (*Tobacco Control* 2006;15:80–1).

While the tobacco industry remains under the control of a government monopoly, the *Regie*—which has the exclusive right to import/export local tobacco products and issue licences to tobacco growers—competition for market share within this substantial and growing market remains fierce among the transnational tobacco companies. In 2002 Philip Morris, British American Tobacco, Japan Tobacco International and the French-Spanish company Altadis held 93% of the cigarette market. Altadis alone now holds more than 10% of the Lebanese market, which it describes as “outstanding”. Smoking prevalence is 46% for adult males and 35% for adult females, among the highest rates for females in the region; 8.3% of 13–15 year olds are current cigarette smokers (12.1% of boys and 5.6% of girls).

Just one of the cigarette promotions taking place in February was held at a car rally and ski race at the Faqra Club mountain resort, and was part-spon-



Young women dressed in Gitanes branded jackets distributed free cigarettes before a car rally and ski race at the Faqra Club mountain resort in Lebanon.

sored by Altadis. The event featured cars branded with Gauloises and young women dressed in Gitanes branded jackets distributing free samples of cigarettes before the race. The event was advertised on posters throughout Lebanese university campuses. While the distribution of free samples to people under 18 years old has been prohibited in Lebanon since 1995, the young women were not seen checking the age of the recipients. Interestingly, the distribution of free samples and university advertising would seem to violate Altadis's own code of conduct, which claims that marketing campaigns are directed only at adults, and “our advertising never depicts people under 25”. Most university students in Lebanon are 17–21 years old.

It is clear that the Lebanese government will need to act more concertedly than in the past to ensure compliance with the FCTC. The adoption of comprehensive legislation banning tobacco advertising, marketing and sponsorship, and its effective enforcement, is urgently needed in Lebanon. Without this change, it will simply be business as usual for the tobacco industry.

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Spain: lessons of a not-so-smoke-free law

Under a law that came into force at the beginning of the year, smoking has been completely banned (not even allowing any smoking areas) in all workplaces in Spain, except in the hospitality and gambling sectors. There, depending on the size or where the premises are located, different regulations apply.

Some important lessons are emerging from this two-tier system.

The regulations allow the owners of bars and restaurants having a “useful surface for clients” smaller than 100 square metres to decide whether or not they allow smoking in their premises. They can also decide to have a partial ban, either by making separate areas according to the regulations for larger premises, or by putting up signs informing customers in which part of the premises (without physical barriers) smoking is permitted. There is no definition in the law about the meaning of “useful surface”, so owners tend to want as much useless surface as possible to avoid having to be considered a larger place. Most bars fall in this category, and most of them allow smoking, as they fear the loss of revenue.

In those bars and restaurants larger than 100 square metres of “useful surface” smoking is banned, but completely isolated smoking areas can be created, requiring good ventilation systems, and can occupy as much as 30% of the useful surface. If these changes are not carried out by 1 September this year, the entire premises must be smoke-free. This means some owners have to invest in reshaping the premises, or else ban smoking. Many say they do not understand why the law makes this difference.

Spain's regional governments have the right and duty to assure compliance to the new law, and can even improve the legislation within their territories (see Spain: going smoke free. *Tobacco Control* 2006;15:79–80). The first problem arose from the lack of time to understand, interpret and prepare guidelines for those affected by the law. It was published on 27 December 2005, and entered into force just days later, on 1 January 2006. More than three months later, regional governments were still setting guidelines, with some significant differences between regions.

The law lacks definitions of two concepts where interpretation is crucial, especially in the hospitality sector. Even after several meetings of tobacco control experts from the different Autonomous Communities, it has not been possible to get agreement. One concept not defined is “useful surface”, and the other has to do with premises where two different activities occur. For example, the law allows for up to 10% of the useful surface for smoking areas in bus or train stations and airports. To avoid the surface dedicated to bars or restaurants becoming the smoking area of such premises, the law introduces the concept of “different activities”, allowing

for smoking sections in both the bar and the rest of the station or airport. But in the hospitality industry, owners of so called "bar-restaurant" venues larger than 100 square metres argue that it is up to them to decide what to do if the "different activities", say bar and restaurant, are individually smaller than 100 square metres. Under this interpretation, smoking would be permitted in many more venues.

Independently of their size, those bars and restaurants located (among others) within factories, public administration buildings, hospitals or educational settings, or selling takeaway food, must be completely smoke-free. In malls and shopping centres, on the other hand, smoking is banned in smaller venues. For all these venues, the owners say the law has made some of their clients change to bars elsewhere that allow smoking.

Some of the owners of bars and restaurants that initially chose to go smoke-free later reversed their decision because of a real loss of smoking customers. Although nearly 70% of the Spanish population are non-smokers, they are (at least at present) under-represented among the clients of bars and restaurants.

The different treatment given by the law to the hospitality industry has provoked both negative and positive reactions. On the one hand, some places are now smoke-free, and others are moving towards becoming smoke-free in a few months. Furthermore, the hospitality sector owners are now divided, with some representatives of the bar and restaurant associations asking for a total ban in all premises, as they recognise this will be the only way to eliminate the differences created by the law within the sector. They assume that sooner or later new regulations, maybe from the European Union or as a result of a judicial decision, will oblige all of their businesses to go smoke-free.

According to official sources, the workplace ban has been implemented with success in most places. However, the situation for waiters has actually worsened; this is because smoking is no longer allowed in offices and so smokers have moved to the nearest bar during breaks or after the office closes. It has also got worse for customers in some regions, as in the past local regulations required even small businesses to have separate (although not physically separated) areas, and these have now disappeared.

But what about the workers? The law cites the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) report on passive smoking, recognising that it can



UK: politicians sent fake cigarette packs Earlier this year, as members of parliament were preparing to debate what sort of smoking restrictions English workplaces should have (Scotland had already decided on a full ban), Cancer Research UK sent all members of parliament a fake cigarette pack with warnings such as "Second-hand smoke kills bar workers". Given the unusual luxury of a free vote, with no guidelines or orders from party "whips" about which way to vote, an overwhelming vote was registered for a total workplace ban, genuinely representing what public opinion polls had been showing for a long time.

cause cancer, hence the reason why smoking has been banned in the workplace. So why does it not offer the same level of protection to those working in the hospitality sector? Perhaps the main reasons were pressure from the tobacco industry, to which the hospitality industry so closely allied itself for so long, and the lack of demand for protection by trade unions. The main mistake in this law has been the fact that it considers workplaces in general and the hospitality sector as being different scenarios. In the first, those to be protected are the workers, but in the second, the customers.

It has been disturbing to see senior health officials arguing that in the hospitality sector, customers can choose where to go so long as there are smoke-free areas, but ignoring the fact that in the smoking areas, the workers are not free to choose where to work. One of the key factors in Ireland's success was the commitment of the trade unions, in strong contrast to Spain. More needs to be done to inform trade unions, politicians and the public about passive smoking, and especially to convince politicians that these regulations not only protect the health of employees, but do not have economic implications leading to job losses.

In summary, the chaos generated within the hospitality sector in Spain simply underlines how smoke-free laws applying equally to all public places (as in Ireland) are much easier to implement. The government has to recognise the problems created by the law, and change the situation as soon as possible. The hospitality industry may actually be prepared for the change, provided the law applies equally to all premises. From the broader public health perspective, including trying to persuade smokers to quit, non-smoking regulations are of great help, as in effect they make smoking a private matter that should never be allowed in shared places.

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New Zealand: Pacific islanders' smoking targeted

Minority groups frequently miss out on targeted television cessation campaigns because of the high costs of television advertising. In New Zealand, some 32% of Pacific peoples living in the country are smokers, but this group makes up a comparatively low 3% of total calls to the national Quitline. Research showed that the lack of Pacific faces on television commercials resulted in Pacific peoples not realising that they could access free Quitline support.

The Quit Group responded by launching its first television commercial, featuring a Samoan man with his family in the background. It aimed to inform Pacific peoples about the risks of heart attack associated with smoking.

Increasing awareness and cessation attempts by Pacific smokers may be a long-term process. Many Pacific communities do not fully understand the risks associated with smoking, and health is viewed as a lower priority than other obligations such as church, family and work. In fact, smoking is still seen as a status symbol. Furthermore, while smoking has traditionally been socially unacceptable for women and taboo for them in public, smoking rates among younger Pacific women are increasing.

Quit New Zealand hopes to raise the percentage of Pacific callers to the Quitline to about 7% of all callers. Heavily subsidised nicotine replacement therapy removes most cost barriers to making a quit attempt. The Quitline also employs Pacific advisors who can communicate with callers in their own languages.

Response to the new commercial, which was launched in late March,



A television commercial launched in New Zealand has specifically targeted Pacific peoples, warning about the risk of heart attack associated with smoking.

was high and also resulted in interest throughout the Pacific, with news items about smoking and the campaign being aired in countries such as Samoa.

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USA: Philip Morris deplores bad taste

The Smoking Gun website (<http://www.thesmokinggun.com/>) recently revealed that Philip Morris had its law firm, Arnold & Porter LLP, send a "cease and desist" letter to Bobble Head World, the maker of a ceramic "Smoking Baby". The problem? The box design for the inexpensive doll (not much more or less costly than a pack of cigarettes, depending on where you live) bears a logo "confusingly similar" to Marlboro's famous red and white chevron. According to the legal letter, these designs "are clearly intended to evoke an unsavoury association" with Marlboro.

Easy to understand the angst at Philip Morris. Creating unsavoury associations with Marlboro is best left to the tobacco professionals.

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Denmark: that tired old freedom thing again

A curious event took place recently in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, a

country that prides itself on its support for freedom of speech and information. The concept is apparently of little interest to the tobacco industry when it comes to telling Danish smokers just how many serious risks they are taking, though warmly embraced when the industry is fighting to retain ways of promoting cigarettes. So long as one is not too fussy about the integrity of the arguments involved, most aspects of tobacco control policy can be framed as an invasion of personal freedoms. It was with such reasoning, presumably, that Venstres Ungdom, the largest and oldest political youth movement in Denmark, with about 2000 members and eight members of parliament, recently held the event in question.

Venstre Ungdom, literally meaning "left youth", is akin to a youth wing of Venstre, the political party of the prime minister and the largest political party in Denmark. Despite its left of centre origins, Venstre is now a right-of-centre party and currently governs in coalition with other conservative parties. Venstre Ungdom certainly struck a chord more familiar with conservative politics in seemingly supporting industry interests against tobacco control policy. The organisation arranged the "happening" in front of the Danish parliament, Christiansborg, during which its members offered all those passing by, politicians and the general public, free cigarettes or nicotine replacement therapy products. The intention, apparently, was to provide a platform for the political idea of "people being able to

decide for themselves without any regulation from the government", echoing perhaps the industry's most familiar, if over-used, mantra.

When questioned later by a concerned doctor, the president of the party's youth wing admitted that he knew that the voluntary agreement between the tobacco industry and government in Denmark prohibited the tobacco industry from distributing cigarettes free of charge, but he saw that as an image building exercise by the industry. He had no clear answer to the question as to why Venstre Ungdom did not have the same ambition for image building. And he may have been a little taken aback when his expression of a clearly negative attitude to "health extremists" met with the robust expression of an equal and opposite dislike by the doctor for "pushers in nice clothes". He even seemed concerned about why the doctor was questioning him. But this, after all, was Denmark, land of freedom of information and expression.

Czech Republic: film targets still in frame

In the Czech Republic, the advertising and promotion of tobacco products, including sponsorship, was banned in 2004. The country has a long and distinguished history of cinema and there are two main film festivals, FF Karlovy Vary and Febiofest (Prague). Philip Morris was for several years the main sponsor of the Karlovy Vary festival. In 2005, instead of being a direct sponsor, Philip Morris helped in other ways, such as bringing VIP guests to the festival and providing accommodation for them. At the end of June 2005, just before the festival, a special issue of a weekly magazine *Instinkt* was published. The cover page of this issue featured the president of the film festival, Jiri Bartoska, together with a famous film actor, Jiri Machacek, both wreathed in cigarette smoke. Inside, in a picture showing the festival president with another actor, cigarettes again constituted a major element of the image.

The other film festival, Febiofest, last held in March this year, was sponsored by British American Tobacco (BAT). Since sponsorship using the name of tobacco products is prohibited, BAT instead used its programme Vzdušný Prostor ("Airspace") to promote the film festival. In fact, what BAT was really promoting, apart from its munificence in sponsoring the festival, was the idea of ventilation as the solution to deal with smoking in restaurants and other indoor spaces, an issue then being widely discussed in the



The ceramic "Smoking baby", the subject of a "cease and desist" letter from Philip Morris.



The cover of the weekly Czech magazine, *Instinkt*, featuring Karlovy Vary film festival president Jiri Bartoska, with actor Jiri Machacek, both wreathed in cigarette smoke.

Czech Republic. BAT's advertisements included pictures of clean, smart bar interiors with not a whiff of smoke to be seen, a sight somewhat at variance with the present situation, which only a total ban will solve.

Malaysia: "transparency" – industry people at FCTC talks

The Malaysian ministry of health recently held a half-day consultation meeting to discuss the amendment of the 2004 Malaysian Control of Tobacco Products Regulations to bring them into line with the requirements of the FCTC. To the amazement of the 11 people from non-governmental organisations at the meeting, 11 representatives from the tobacco industry were also present, in addition to 10 ministry officials. Among the industry participants were what one startled health worker called a "gang" from BAT, as well as representatives of Philip Morris and Sampoerna, the Indonesian manufacturer it acquired last year, and Japan Tobacco International.

Health personnel protested, saying it was clearly inconsistent with the FCTC, but the official chairing the meeting said it was the ministry's policy to be "transparent". Sickeningly, the people interested in health had to listen to those interested in selling tobacco trotting out their public relations nonsense about how they fully supported the government in regulating tobacco in line with the FCTC.

Examples like this of the new public stance of the companies who fought tooth and nail to stop or subvert the FCTC are worrying. Either the companies think they can live with it, which means it is far from a comprehensive solution to controlling the industry, or else they will use their massive economic influence to try to ensure that national legislation passed under the FCTC has as many loopholes as it takes to allow them to carry on as before.

In the past, Malaysia was infamous for having among the world's worst "voluntary agreement" with the tobacco industry, which took brand-stretching to new depths of absurdity. Conversely, it is known as one of the toughest countries in the world on the enforcement of laws against illegal drugs. When will it learn that allowing the tobacco industry a place at the health table is like consulting the Mafia on anti-drug laws? It is vital for the health of future generations of Malaysians that it does not find itself once again an international laughing stock for its tobacco control strategy, with the health of its citizens once more compromised.

Canada: a new angle on packs

Point-of-sale marketing is among the most widespread and effective forms of tobacco marketing, particularly in countries such as Canada where other forms of tobacco advertising are prohibited. It is therefore not surprising that tobacco companies continue to search for ways to increase the salience of package displays and other forms of point-of-sale marketing.

Imperial Tobacco Canada, a wholly owned subsidiary of BAT and the largest tobacco manufacturer in Canada, has recently added a new twist to retail displays. It has begun marketing du Maurier, one of Canada's leading brands, in octagon-shaped packages, with angled edges on the front and back of the package face. After a limited release in the province of Ontario in June 2005, the new packs are now being introduced across the country.

Jeff Guiler, vice-president of marketing for Imperial Tobacco, explained that the new shape was a way to attract consumer attention in a market with limited opportunities for advertising and promotion. In particular, it was a way to reinforce the "prestige" of the du Maurier brand and to distinguish it from the growing number of discount brands in Canada. Guiler explained the implications of the new packages for the point-of-sale environment: "We decided that in order to leverage the full impact of the Signature Pack and overcome the



du Maurier, one of Canada's leading brands, now being marketed in octagon-shaped packages, in an effort to reinforce the "prestige" of the brand.

fact that we are not allowed to do any kind of advertising, we needed to also redesign and refit our in-store displays to mirror the look of the pack."

The design also decreases the prominence of the health warnings. The brand information is positioned on the flat surface of the pack, whereas a significant portion of the warning appears on the angled sections that are less visible, particularly when viewed on a retail display.

Overall, the move underscores the importance of the package as a cornerstone of industry marketing and the need for more comprehensive restrictions on point-of-sale displays. To date, two provinces in Canada (Saskatchewan and Manitoba) and one territory (Nunavut) have introduced comprehensive bans on retail displays of cigarette packages, with bans in Canada's two most populous provinces, Ontario and Quebec, due to follow in 2008. Meanwhile, last September, Thailand joined Iceland as the only countries in the world to introduce national bans on cigarette displays. These measures are critical to ensuring that new packaging and other point-of-sale initiatives do not undermine comprehensive advertising restrictions.

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Mauritius: British minister flouts rules to greet BAT man

Health workers in Mauritius are accustomed to their government's willingness to cosy up to BAT, the hugely dominant cigarette manufacturer in the local tobacco market, especially when the company lubricates the relationship with university education grants and other economic beads for the natives.

But they felt a bitter disappointment recently to see the British government doing the same thing.

In March, newspapers carried cheery reports, complete with colour photographs, of the acting British High Commissioner attending a high profile reception organised by BAT to welcome its new general manager in Mauritius. Not only were those trying to protect the health of Mauritians sickened by yet more positive publicity for BAT, but they had every right to expect a boycott. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's guidelines for senior diplomats (quaintly termed "posts") clearly state, "Posts should not inter alia be associated in any way with the promotion of the tobacco industry... Nor should they attend or otherwise support receptions or high profile events—especially those where a tobacco company is the sole or main sponsor."

Action on Smoking and Health, the UK's leading public health campaign on tobacco, wrote to the Foreign Secretary expressing its concern and demanding an explanation, and to request him to remind all "posts" of the FCO guidelines, to ensure that such participation is not repeated elsewhere.

The UK government nowadays likes to think it is in the forefront of tobacco control, and as one of the countries that has ratified the FCTC, it has a responsibility, as the FCTC states, to "be alert to any efforts by the tobacco industry to undermine or subvert tobacco control efforts". So Foreign Office officials will have their work cut out to explain not one, but two serious breaches.

Australia: health warnings canned

Since 1 March 2006, all tobacco products manufactured or imported into Australia have been required to be sold in packaging that includes the new graphic picture-based warnings (<http://www.quitnow.info.au/warnings/warnings.htm>).

However, a month before the regulation came into effect a tobacco company was caught marketing cigarettes in trendy retro-style tins which, unlike packets of cigarettes with printed warnings, had health warning stickers that were easily peeled off. The manufacturers appeared to be taking advantage of an apparent loophole in regulations that allow cigarettes not sold in the traditional soft packs or flip tops to carry



An Australian tobacco company recently marketed its product in tins, with health warning stickers that could be peeled off easily.

the mandatory health warnings on adhesive labels.

The warning labels are supposed to be fastened firmly and not easily removed. But in testing a tin of Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes bought in Perth, Western Australia the labels were easily removed.

Retailers reported that the tins were very popular with young smokers, and it is likely that they removed the warning labels and then transferred the cigarettes straight into the tin. The National Heart Foundation of Australia made a formal complaint about this breach of legislation to Australia's Competition and Consumer Commission.

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Czech Republic: addiction course includes tobacco

A new three year degree course, on "addictology", has begun at Charles University in Prague. What makes it noteworthy is that it includes tobacco dependence.

In the second year of the course, 30 teaching hours are being devoted to the epidemiology of tobacco, including the history and scope of the tobacco pandemic, its health impacts, and tobacco use related to different medical fields.

Current treatment guidelines are presented, including short interventions by doctors, intensive intervention for specialists, and group and individual therapy, as well as the possibilities for treatment in the Czech Republic, where specialised centres are starting work. Information about the international tobacco control community is also given.

The course is a long overdue and serious attempt to study the problem. Its focus is on evidence-based information about effective treatment, the economic impact of tobacco addiction, and the treatment of tobacco dependence in other countries. The course will also inform students about the use of the highly addictive drug potential of nicotine by tobacco companies, based on examples drawn from tobacco industry documents. After lengthy discussions, the study of tobacco problems was incorporated into the Czech national drug prevention strategy by the government last year.

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UK: smoke-free effect on pension funds

In the run-up to the recent vote to make all public places in England smoke-free, there were frequent, often strident assertions from those who were fighting for tobacco rather than health, that the move would have no effect on consumption. But as health campaigners were celebrating the victorious parliamentary vote, commercial institutions were busy assessing the likely long term effects on the economy. Research by human resources firm Hewitt Associates estimated that the ban could add up to £20 billion (US\$35 billion) to UK pension deficits, as well as increasing the annual cost to companies providing defined benefit schemes.

No doubt the tobacco industry will continue to plead no effect in other countries contemplating a total ban, and health ministers and other prime movers would be well advised to consult their financial institutions, as well as their medical and health experts, to at least cut down the time wasted by false arguments by desperate tobacco interests. As with any aspect of tobacco control policy, effectiveness is proportional to the volume of industry protest.