LETTERS TO
THE EDITOR

Letters intended for publication should be a maximum of 500 words, 10 references, and one table or figure, and should be sent to the editor at the address given on the inside front cover. Those responding to articles or correspondence published in the journal should be received within six weeks of publication.

Whose standard is it, anyway?

EDITOR—In their recent article in Tobacco Control Bialous and Yach1 create the impression that international standards for the machine smoking of cigarettes were foisted on the smoking public unilaterally by the tobacco industry by its influence on the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) through control of CORESTA (Centre de Co-operation pour les Recherches Scientifiques au Tabac). They also allege, inter alia, that the tobacco industry (has, through CORESTA, changed the methodology in order to produce lower smoke yield values to get round the European “tar” ceiling directives, and (2) misleads the public by developing low “tar” cigarettes to fool the smoking machine, and then makes unjustified health claims about them. (“Standards” are documented agreements containing technical specifications or concise criteria to be used consistently as rules guidelines.)

In their article, Bialous and Yach1 concentrated predominantly on a few highly selective quotes from internal tobacco company documents. They appear not to have consulted much of the very large volume of scientific literature published on the subject. When this information is taken into account it becomes obvious that the very narrow and restricted literature base of Bialous and Yach’s analysis has resulted in them making factual errors, drawing wrong conclusions and writing inaccurate statements on many aspects of the subject.

A review of the published literature on the subject shows clearly that the broad facts are as follows:

1 Techniques relevant to the machine smoking of cigarettes were developed and refined throughout the 20th century.1 The first standard was specified by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), a US federal government agency, in 1966 and first used to test cigarettes in 1967.1 The CORESTA recommended method, similar in many respects to that of the FTC, was developed after the FTC standard and was published in 1969.2

2 There were small differences in the details of the smoking machine procedures in the various standard methods developed by the FTC and subsequently CORESTA, ISO and authorities in the UK, Germany, Canada and elsewhere between 1969 and the late 1970s.3 These differences resulted in about a 10% difference in the “tar” yield of the same cigarette measured by authorities in Britain and Germany, for example. By the late 1980s it was recognised that this situation was unacceptable in view of pending European directives which specified “tar” ceilings for all cigarettes sold in member states across Europe from 1993. Consequently, the differences in methodology were harmonised in a common ISO standard method in 1991, developed following a considerable amount of inter laboratory comparisons of the developing methodology undertaken within CORESTA across 29 laboratories from 15 countries.4 This revised standard method is now used in all countries except the USA where the slightly different FTC method still continues to be used, and in Japan where some minor differences are used in their national standard. Changing to the ISO standard in the early 1990s, “tar” yields determined in the UK, for example, decreased by up to 0.5 mg while “tar” yields in Canada, for example, increased by up to 3 mg for some brands.

3 The purpose of the smoking machine standards is to determine the “tar”, nicotine, and carbon monoxide content of cigarette smoke when the cigarette is smoked under precisely defined conditions, and hence to allow a comparison of the yields from different cigarettes. Such yields are not predictive of the yields humans obtain when smoking, nor were they ever expected to be so, since no two smokers smoke exactly the same nor does a smoker smoke a cigarette the same way on every occasion. This purpose has been stated consistently many times, originally by the FTC in 1967,2 and subsequently in the scientific literature, published by the tobacco industry and health/regulatory authorities, over the last 35 years, e.g.

4 Compensation by smokers when switching to a low “tar” cigarette has been discussed in the scientific literature for 40 years. The phenomenon was first published by the tobacco industry and tobacco industry scientists have published books and papers on the subject, e.g.10 11 The available evidence, albeit limited, indicates that compensation is partial in the short term (up to a few weeks), and that smokers switching from a higher to a lower “tar” yield cigarette do generally obtain a reduction in smoke delivery.11

5 Since the 1950s numerous health scientists have advocated that lower “tar” cigarettes should be developed on the grounds that they may represent a less hazardous form of smoking, e.g.12 13 Health authorities have consistently advised smokers to quit, but for those who choose to continue to smoke that they should smoke lower “tar” cigarettes, e.g.14 15 The tobacco industry has responded to these health authorities by developing cigarettes with lower “tar” but has also followed public health advice not to advertise lower “tar” cigarettes as safe cigarettes.

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EDITOR—In a recent article, Bialous and Yach attempt “to describe the extent of the tobacco industry involvement in establishing international standards for tobacco and tobacco products.” They assert that “it is clear that the tobacco industry, through [CORESTA], play a major role in determining the scientific evidence and suggesting the standards that are eventually developed as international standards.” Finally, they conclude that “ISO’s tobacco and tobacco products standards are not adequate to guide tobacco products regulatory policies, and no health claims can be made based on [these] standards.” Moreover, along the way, these authors seem to suggest unfairness in CORESTA’s involvement in the standards setting process and offer some examples that, they believe, support a contention that is in fact untrue.

CORESTA (Cooperation Centre for Scientific Research Relative to Tobacco) is an organisation devoted entirely to issues related to tobacco science. Those issues range from plant breeding and genetics to technological aspects to manufacturing and analytical determination of smoke yields. That the majority of worldwide tobacco science expertise resides within the tobacco industry should come as surprise to no one (as would be true for most industries facing technical challenges). That many of these same experts find themselves involved in CORESTA and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) TC-126 activities should, likewise, be of no surprise. Development of technical standards, whether within CORESTA or ISO or elsewhere, without relying on the best available technical expertise would, of course, be irrational.

Regarding the suggestion of impropriety, Bialous and Yach outline three areas they believe support their case. First, they claim “[ISO] standards are approved as recommended by CORESTA, with limited opportunity for significant amendments”. Offered as an example is an excerpt of CORESTA minutes regarding ISO/DIS 11454, stating that the DIS (Draft

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International Standard) will be published as an international standard with no changes other than editorial. What Bialous and Yach apparently fail to appreciate is that the ISO approval process leading up to the DIS stage involved a development period of at least four years and multiple balloting stages (opportu-
nities) for significant amendments. For
example, balloting at the previous committee
draft stage (ISO/TC 126 N 537, July 1995)
generated nine pages of comments from 12
countries. The 1997 CORESTA minutes refl-
ected only that at the DIS stage in the over-
all ISO process, no changes had been
requested by ISO members other than those
of an editorial nature.

Secondly, Bialous and Yach made a compo-
antial assertion, that “CORESTA works with
ISO directly or that CORESTA works through
one of ISO’s member bodies”. CORESTA
does not have a liaison member status
with ISO, but does not work with any of
ISO’s member bodies.

Lastly, Bialous and Yach assert
“CORESTA resists any interference with its
process, and makes efforts to keep
overall control of the situation and the
outcomes of ISO meetings”. Offered as
support is a matter concerning updates to the
ISO smoking methods. Again, an egregious
misinterpretation has resulted. A CORESTA
working group and the British Standards
Institution (BSI) independently prepared edi-
torial commentary on similar issues within the
text of the ISO smoking methods. With
deferral to the ISO process, CORESTA
postponed an update to the existing
CORESTA methods, instead wishing to wait
for ISO to finish their deliberations.

Concerns of impropriety, Bialous
and Yach offer examples that do not
support their contention. Rather to the contrary,
these examples serve as testament to the pro-
piety of the CORESTA-ISO relationship.

We look forward to a continued
relationship with all parties with an interest in
the business of technical standardisation
related to tobacco and tobacco products.

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Author’s reply

EDITOR—Mr Jacob and Dr Baker’s criticisms
of our paper mostly indicate an incomplete
reading of it. We believe our paper reached its
point also made by Dr Baker.

Recent literature and health authorities’
recommendations regarding “lower” tar
and nicotine cigarettes show that switching to
lower yields is no longer perceived as an
effective approach to address
tobacco related morbidity and mortality.1,2 Several
countries and the European Union
have already banned or are moving to ban the
utilisation of labels such as “mild” and “lights” based on scientific and tobacco
industry evidence that these mislead the public into thinking these
cigarettes are safer.3,4

Indeed, a 1977 British American Tobacco
(BAT) document stated that work in this
area should be directed towards providing
consumer reassurance about cigarettes and
the smoking habit. This can be provided in
different ways, for example, by claiming low
deliveries, by the perception of low deliveries,
and by the perception of “mildness”. Furthermore, advertising for low delivery or
traditional brands should be constricted in
ways so as not to provoke anxiety about health, but also to enable the smoker to feel assured about the habit
and confident in maintaining it over time.5,6

We do not suggest “impropriety in
CORESTA’s involvement” since, as per the
ISO definition, the industry is entitled to participate in the process.

However, we question the adequacy of having
tobacco interests being the sole provider of
cientific evidence in the area of tobacco
products smoking methods. We question CORESTA’s involvement as much as the lack of involvement from other
interested parties (for example, health and
groups) as well as whether or not the
ISO is fulfilling its aim of protecting the
health and safety of consumers of tobacco
products.

Mr Jacob’s assertion that the “majority of
worldwide tobacco science expertise resides
within the tobacco industry should come as
surprise to no one” is correct. However,
recent literature has shown that this expertise has not been used to benefit the health and
safety of the consumer of tobacco
products.6,7 It is also no surprise that many
of the tobacco industry experts “find
themselves involved in CORESTA and ISO
TC-126 activities”, but it is unacceptable that
these experts are the only ones participat-
ing in these activities.

As for the three specific areas of criticism
in Mr Jacob’s letter:

(1) From the description of the ISO stan-
dards approval process,7 the majority of work
is done at the Technical Committee (TC)
level, and final approval of a DIS (Draft
International Standard) is by the TC as well.
In the case of TC 126, with a majority of
members representing the tobacco industry,
and CORESTA being the organisation
conducting the work on the proposed
standards, amendments are referred back to
the TC and to CORESTA. In the example
offered, ISO TC 126 SC 34 in our paper5
describes some of these comments and how
they represent the tobacco industry’s perspective.

The assertion CORESTA works with
ISO editorially or through one of ISO’s members
bodies ...” emphasises the great
overlap among the people (and interests) who are members of CORESTA, TC 126 and
those involved in the process at member
dishes such as British Standards Institution
(BSI) and American National Standards Insti-
tution (ANSI). Although no official relation
between CORESTA and ISO’s member bod-
ies exists, it is clear that efforts are often
agreed upon. In the example provided, at
a CORESTA Scientific Committee meeting
a modified version of an environmental
effectiveness (EFT) determination was sent to ISO via
ANSI. (An unquoted example, from reference 45,7 states that CORESTA had
prepared a draft standard on ambient air
to be utilised at BSL)

(3) We saw no evidence that CORESTA
accepts outsiders’ input in preparing
standards forwarded to ISO, but it is clear
that it wants to maintain “CORESTA stan-

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19 CORESTA Outgoing Scientific Commission.
18 Scientific Liaison Working Group of the EIG.
15 http://www.iso.ch/iso/en/stdsdevelopment/
daily smokers to have a strong intention to quit
14 Kessler DA. A question of intent: a great American
12 Committee of Experts on Tobacco Industry
Letters, Book
1968 107 65.4 1.1 (0.6 to 2.1) 59 42.4 1.0 (0.5 to 2.0)
1923 101 50.5 0.6 (0.3 to 1.1) 9 33.3 0.6 (0.2 to 2.9)
1953 152 73.7 1.7 (0.96 to 3.0) 32 43.8 1.0 (0.4 to 2.4)
Missing 144 44

T otal

880 272

Snu

user
10–12 years 168 70.2 1.3 (0.8 to 2.0) 76 43.4 1.6 (0.9 to 2.9)
< 9 years 428 61.0 0.8 (0.6 to 1.2) 60 40.0 1.4 (0.7 to 2.7)
Others 2006 54.2 0.7 (0.4 to 1.2) 7 42.9 1.5 (0.3 to 7.3)
Missing 19 28

Snuff use
No 701 63.1 1.0 175 40.6 1.0 15 30.2 0.6 (0.3 to 1.2)
Yes 35 74.3 1.7 (0.8 to 3.7) 53 30.2 0.6 (0.3 to 1.2)
Missing 14 44

Total 880 272

Table 1  Crude odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals of desire to stop smoking among daily smokers and intermittent smokers according to sociodemographic and snuff consumption characteristics. The public health survey in Malmö 1994.
have been documented in cognitive and psychomotor performance. The smoking of intermittent smokers may be motivated by these effects. The results further support the notion that intermittent smokers are a specific group of smokers with smoking cessation characteristics that differ from the characteristics of daily smokers.

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10 Smoking among Japanese nursing students: a nationwide survey

EDITOR—In some developed countries including Japan, smoking prevalence among nursing students tends to be the same or higher than that of the general female population of the same age group. In Japan, an increase in the prevalence of smoking among women in their 20s was recently reported, and this trend is assumed to be reflected in the smoking prevalence of nursing students, where young women are over represented.

To obtain data on smoking prevalence of nursing students, a nationwide survey was conducted among the students of nursing (three year programme), public health nursing (PHN), and midwifery schools. Students of PHN and midwifery are qualified as nurses, and involved in one year training to acquire qualification as PHN and midwives, respectively. The survey was conducted in October 2000 using a self-administered questionnaire.

In 2000, there were 465 three year nursing schools (total number of students: 66 430), 66 PHN schools (1679 students), and 73 midwifery schools (1420 students) in Japan. Among these, 27 nursing schools, 17 PHN schools, and 16 midwifery schools were selected at random, and the survey was carried out on all students in the selected schools. Between selected schools and non-selected schools, little difference was observed with respect to their geographical distribution and student volume size.

Each subject from the selected schools filled in the questionnaire, put it into an envelope, sealed and handed it to the person in charge. The questionnaire included the items of a previous survey on smoking behaviour among nurses, and eight items related to the nicotine dependency scale of Fagerstrom. The return rates were 93% (3866/4169) for the nursing schools, 91% (552/611) for the PHN schools, and 95% (322/334) for the midwifery schools. After excluding incompletely answered questionnaires, 3762, 530, and 303 responses were analysed, respectively. The prevalence of smoking among women was 25% in the PHN schools, 13% in the PHN schools, and 22% in the midwifery schools. In the nursing schools, the prevalence of smoking increased as the grade advanced. In the third year, the prevalence of smoking was 31%, higher than that among the general population in their 20s (23%). As to male students in third year, the prevalence of smoking was nearly the same as that of the general population in their 20s (60%). Furthermore, the nicotine dependency among female daily smokers in the nursing schools was higher than that in the PHN schools or midwifery schools. Therefore, anti-smoking education in nursing schools is urgently needed. In this survey, smoking prevalence was lower among students in the PHN and midwifery schools. The difference occurred because those who had already qualified as nurses and wished to continue studying to acquire another qualification were less likely to smoke than those who were not in the same career level. It is therefore surmised that the prevalence of smoking among less educationally motivated students is lower. Adriaanse and colleagues reported that nurses who were motivated in their jobs had a tendency not to smoke, which is consistent with the results although our subjects were nursing students.

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BOOK

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Smoke in their eyes


There have been memorable dates, both glorious and infamous, that have defined aims and charted progress and setbacks for the US tobacco control movement. The most notable of these events have had global repercussions.

On 15 December 1953, the heads of four major US tobacco firms met in New York City’s Park Plaza Hotel, where they launched the Tobacco Industry Research Council and hammered out the seminal text of a nationwide newspaper ad, “A frank statement to cigarette smokers”. On 11 January 1964, US Surgeon General Luther Terry released the Report of the Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health, concluding "it is the judgment of the Committee that cigarette smoking contributes substantially to mortality from certain specific diseases and to the overall death rate". At the Waxman Hearings on 14 April 1994, the "seven dwarves", chief executive officers (CEOs) of the top seven US tobacco companies, were photographed for posterity as they prepared to declare that "nicotine is not addictive".

At least one more date marks the US tobacco control calendar, but it evokes no signal image, conjures no Immortal quote. And yet, on 3 April 1997, at the Sheraton Hotel in Crystal City, Virginia, an extraordinary meeting did take place. That Thursday afternoon, Geoffrey Bible and Steve Goldstone, CEOs of Philip Morris and RJ Reynolds, respectively, met in secret with trial lawyers and state attorneys general, hoping to hammer out a settlement of litigation pending against the tobacco industry. Along with the CEOs, the lawyers, the attorneys general, and their minions, there was one more participant at that meeting: Matthew Myers, vice president and general counsel of the National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids.

In Smoke in their eyes: lessons in movement leadership from the tobacco wars, Michael Pertschuk describes the political path that led Myers to that Virginia hotel and chronicles what happened in the meeting’s wake. Pertschuk, former head of the US Federal Trade Commission, founder and co-director of the Advocacy Institute, and longtime combatant against Stanton Glantz, University of California professor of medicine and lead author of The cigarette papers. For Pertschuk, the plausible, if arguable benefits of the McCain bill could have been realised if not for the schism cleaving former allies into hostile camps. According to Pertschuk, great public health gains could have been realised had Glantz and his zealous followers not flaunted the debate to suit their purposes.

As a behind-the-scenes look at the personalities and polemics of both advocacy groups and political agencies, the book is a rousing success. Though there are few felicitous literary passages, Pertschuk has obtained detailed accounts from former Surgeon General C Everett Koop, former head of the Food and Drug Administration David Kessler, and other principal players, with the glaring exception of Glantz. The book’s central failing, however, is Pertschuk’s unwillingness or inability to focus on Myers’s secret, unilateral decision to attend that first Virginia meeting.

Myers was like Caesar crossing the Rubicon, with just a slight difference or two. Firstly, the general neglected to tell the troops he’d crowned himself emperor. Then, he realised he didn’t know the way to the river’s edge. Those failings are paramount. Myers’ good intentions should not be doubted, but he paved the path to acrimonious, rancorous debate. The Center for Tobacco-Free Kids was not a well established entity in 1997 and many former allies felt betrayed by Myers’ “lone ranger” tactics. Once turned off, they could not easily be convinced to follow Myers anywhere, as demonstrated by the caustic, pitched battles between the rival ENACT and Save Lives, Not Tobacco coalitions.

The what-could-have-beens of the McCain bill are still being debated. The USA is again playing a negative role on the global tobacco stage, this time with respect to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. What is certain is that the tobacco industry knew what it wanted back in 1997 and still knows what it wants today.

Philosopher Isaiah Berlin famously portrayed the dictum of the Greek poet Archilochus, who wrote: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” The tobacco industry is a huge, knowing hedgehog. Michael Pertschuk’s insight and intellect help explain how the tobacco control movement has outfoxed itself lately, but his Manichean dichotomy of Myers-good, Glantz-bad does the movement a disservice. The hedgehog rolls along. The fox needs a new game plan.

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Smoking in movies in 2000 exceeded rates in the 1960s

KAREN KACIRK and STANTON A GLANTZ

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