

AD WATCH

Scenes from Chile

Although they haven't been sold in the US in decades for obvious reasons, in Chile, "Life" cigarettes are still one of the country's most popular brands. So is "Advance" – "Advance to what, your death?", wonders Dr Ricardo Araya, a professor of public health and anti-smoking advocate in Santiago.

Cecilia Sepúlveda, who oversees cancer programmes for the Chilean Ministry of Health, including tobacco control, doesn't have time to worry about brand names, however. She is too busy with the one tobacco control programme she has been able to get funded: training health care workers to encourage patients to stop smoking.

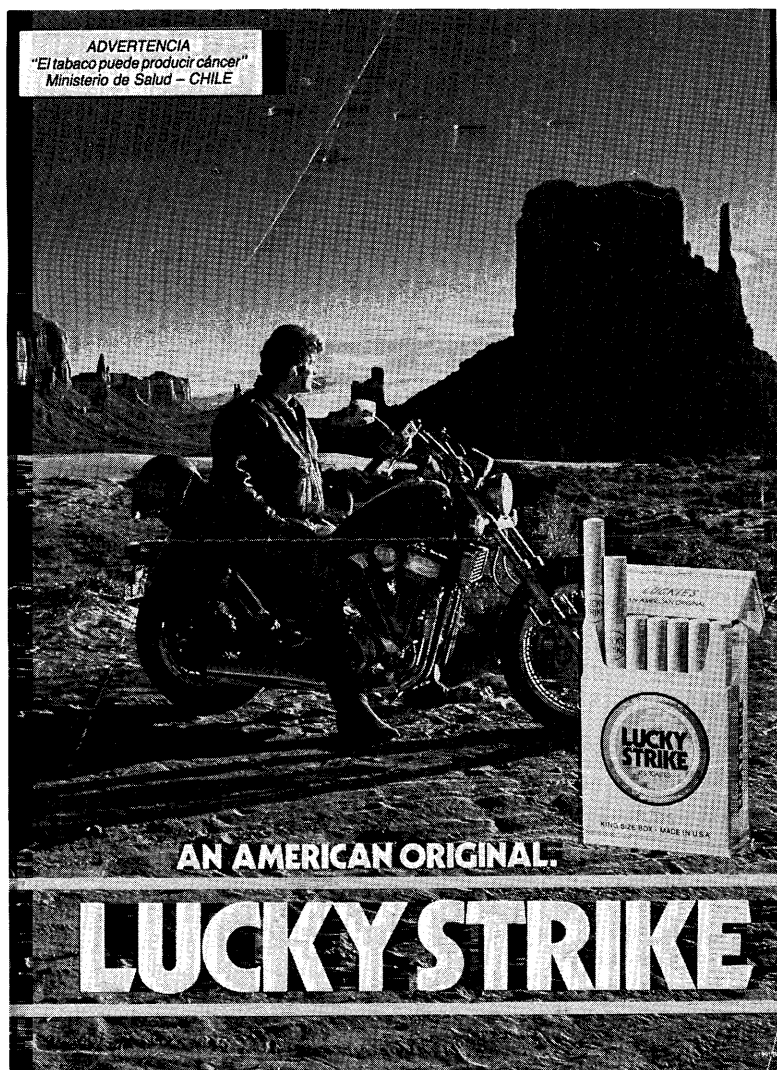
The job is no small feat, as 40% of health care workers themselves smoke and so do about 35% of Chile's 13 million people. Chile has the strongest economy of any in Latin America, which doesn't bode well for tobacco

control, as smoking is most popular among those with the highest socioeconomic status.

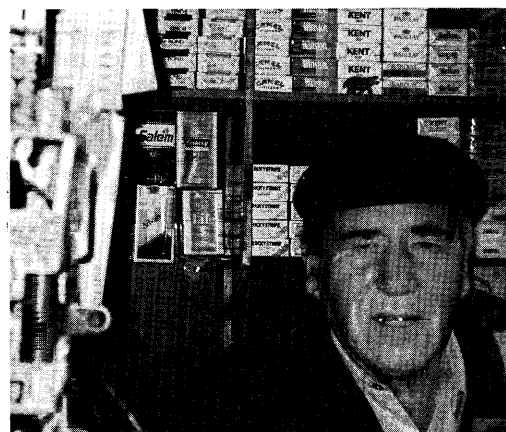
To Sepúlveda's dismay, money for tobacco control in Chile has just about dried up. The World Health Organisation (WHO) headquarters offered none in 1993 and neither did the Ministry of Health (whose director is a smoker) despite a billion dollar health budget. Sepúlveda's total budget – \$20 000, all of which is being used to train health care workers – came from the Pan American Health Organisation, the WHO's regional office. This despite the fact that 13% of the population die from smoking-attributable diseases. There is also an alarming trend in age-adjusted lung cancer deaths, which have increased between 1968 and 1987 by 18% for men and 23% for women.¹ As women gain a modicum of equality in social and economic sectors in Chile they are being targeted by advertising equally as well. As they begin to smoke equally, they will die equally, points out Sepúlveda.

On a warm, sunny winter afternoon, shortly after school has finished, at a video arcade in a Santiago suburb, teenagers gather to play video games and to smoke. Like at the kiosks on every street corner in Santiago, cigarettes can be bought individually at video arcades, and there is nothing illegal about selling cigarettes to children. Nor are the cigarette companies breaking any laws when the "Gang of Blondes", as they are called by some local journalists, pass out cigarettes to young people at malls or at discos in the lively Bellavista section of Santiago.

"I smoke Lucky Strike because they are good", says Luis, a handsome 16-year-old boy, without lifting his eyes from his video screen. Two friends, both 14 years old, look on, sharing a cigarette they bought for about 10 cents. Health officials worry about the huge popularity of cigarettes among young people.



Advertisement from the magazine Geomundo. The health message reads, "WARNING/'Tobacco can cause cancer'/Ministry of Health - CHILE"



A kiosk vendor selling "Life" and other cigarette brands



Lucky Strike billboard in the center of downtown Santiago

Studies show that 55% of 15- and 16-year-olds in Chile smoke.

"I've seen on TV that it's bad. It starts to make your lungs bad," said 16-year-old Patricio, who sells cigarettes to kids as young as 10 from his cart of sweets and smokes in the El Golf neighbourhood. Almost everyone he knows of his own age smokes, he adds. In fact, studies indicate that 15% of girls who smoke report having started to smoke between ages 10 and 12.

Chile is BAT country. BAT Industries, a British company which also owns Brown and Williamson in the US, sells 17 different cigarette brands in Chile through its subsidiary Chiletobacos, including Life, Advance, Kent, Viceroy, and the heavily advertised Lucky Strike. Its Lucky Strike campaign, a man on a motorcycle in Monument Valley, Arizona, with the slogan "An American Original", greets you on every available space at the country's airport outside Santiago.

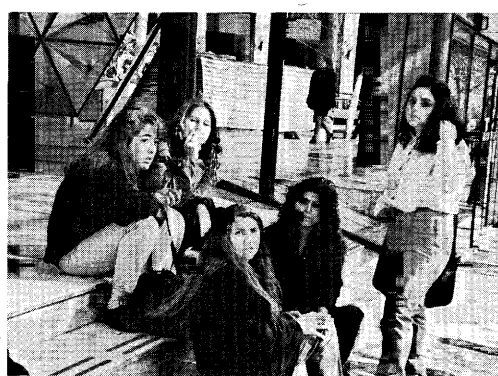
As in the US, BAT and the other company that sells cigarettes in Chile, do what they can to ingratiate themselves with the politicians and the general public. In the past three years, tobacco companies have donated sculptures to the National Congress building, motorcycles to the police department, and radios to customs officials. They pay for seminars for journalists, televisions for rural schools, and scholarships for musical prodigies.

Perhaps this has something to do with why a law that has been on the books since 1990, stating that cigarette ads on television must be followed by a spoken warning that tobacco may cause cancer, has never been enforced (TV ads are allowed after 21:30). Or why tobacco companies were able to stop the distribution of an anti-smoking postage stamp.

Or perhaps the bottom line has more to do with the bottom line; 5% of the country's total tax revenue come from the sale of cigarettes. A



Lucky Strike ads on luggage trolleys at the Santiago airport



Women who smoke like men, die like men

government whose claim to fame is economic development and which prizes unlimited growth and a free market is not about to clamp down on any industry, points out Dr Francisco Xavier Almarza, a local physician and economist who has done many studies on smoking prevalence in Chile.

Santiago, where nearly half of Chile's population lives, has another problem that is only beginning to be investigated. The city is one of the most dusty and polluted in Latin America, recording only 69 acceptable air days in 1991. That same year respiratory illness increased by 80% in children and by 30% in adults.²

As automobile exhaust fumes are largely responsible, the government has enacted a law that only allows people to drive their cars on certain days. But still, and especially in the wintertime, a layer of stagnant air hangs over the city like the lid of a pot, trapped by the mountains that ring much of the town. Environmentalists are concerned that carcinogenic air pollutants, in combination with high smoking rates, could cause future health problems of enormous proportions.

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1 Pan American Health Organization. *Tobacco or health: Status in the Americas*. Washington, DC: PAHO, 1992. (PAHO Scientific Publication No 536.)

2 Martinez G, ed. *Contaminación en Santiago*. Santiago, Chile: Atena, 1992, 102 pp.