

introduction of an early standard for the UK, based on the US model. It said it would consult with, among others, the Chief Fire Officers' Association, the fire brigade's union, anti-smoking groups and tobacco manufacturers.

This is the result of 2 years campaigning by tobacco control activists in Europe, with significant help and advice from Greg Connolly, François Damphousse and many others working on this issue in the USA and Canada.

Deborah Arnott

Action on Smoking & Health, London, UK;
deborah.arnott@ash.org.uk

Florence Berteletti

Smoke Free Partnership, Brussels, Belgium;
florence.berteletti@ersnet.org

SRI LANKA: BAT'S CSR AWARD

The unctuous efforts of British American Tobacco (BAT) to ingratiate itself with the government in Sri Lanka, presumably in the hope of forestalling effective measures that might damage its near monopoly market there, have paid off handsomely. Its local subsidiary, Ceylon Tobacco Company (CTC), has been named one of the 10 best corporate citizens of 2007.

The selection criteria for the awards, organised by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce in association with the World Conservation Union, backed by the Netherlands government as principal sponsor, were environment, community relations, employee relations, customer relations and economic performance. CTC was reportedly selected on account of its contribution to "uplifting the lives of the rural masses".

Comments in the local media attributed to CTC contained some truly emetic statements about its corporate social responsibility activities. Corporate-speak phrases ranging from environmental responsibility, engine of economic development, support for communities, high standards of ethical behaviour and greater transparency, jostled for space with buzzwords such as stakeholders, controversy and empowerment. To the statement by the country's trade minister, who presided at the awards ceremony, that responsible business conduct could make a significant contribution to addressing the social and environmental challenges the country was facing, one could only ask what his colleague the health minister would have thought about the challenges faced from disease, disability and premature death among the award winner's customers. So ends another unfortunate chapter in Sri Lanka's history of seeing, hearing and speaking no evil about the

tobacco industry, while seeming to care not a jot about its citizens' health.

WORLD: STRONGER LINE FOR WORLD'S MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS

The World Medical Association (WMA), representing some 85 national medical associations, adopted a strong new statement on tobacco at its general assembly held in Copenhagen, Denmark in October. The main recommendations of the new statement, developed by amending one first adopted in 1988 and then revised in 1997, are addressed to all national medical associations and all physicians, urging them to take a wide range of action to help reduce the health hazards related to tobacco use. Such action includes adopting a policy position opposing smoking and the use of tobacco products, and publicising the policy; prohibiting smoking at all business, social, scientific and ceremonial meetings of national medical associations, in line with the WMA's decision to impose a similar ban at all its own meetings; and undertaking programmes to educate the profession and the public about the health hazards of tobacco use (including addiction) and exposure to secondhand smoke, as well as supporting cessation and prevention.

In addition, a long list of other, specific action is recommended, covering physician activity in virtually all areas of tobacco control policy at every level. Of special note are those areas deriving from the special potential and responsibilities of physicians, often underrated or overlooked by medical associations, such as the exemplar role of physicians, their duty to oppose tobacco industry funding of education and research, increasing input about tobacco in medical education and influencing governments to implement model tobacco control policy. The entire statement can be found at <http://www.wma.net/e/policy/h4.htm>.

UK: BAD NEWS, GOOD PROGRESS

Many health advocates have mixed feelings about attention being focused on laws banning the sale of tobacco products to children, especially as tobacco companies are so fond of the topic. The industry's interest lies in underlining smoking as an adult practice, thus reinforcing the forbidden fruit image that helps recruit children to smoking. However, all agree that if there is a law, then at least it should be properly enforced, whereas the industry, while advocating it in public, privately recognises that good compliance is against its commercial interests.

Over more than 3 decades, surveys have been carried out periodically in Scotland to measure the percentage of retailers who knowingly sell cigarettes to children. In the bad old days when industry was king, a steady eight out of 10 shops sold them to appropriately briefed children sent in to test the law. In separate surveys, retailers' knowledge of the law was tested, too. It was always higher than compliance, though some retailers seemed genuinely ignorant of the law. Huge campaigns were carried out to increase knowledge and compliance among retailers, funded by the industry to try to bribe the government not to tighten up its almost worthless "voluntary agreements" on advertising. As a result, retailers' knowledge increased; but compliance budged not an inch. Eight out of 10 shops still sold to children.

Perhaps most amazing was the reaction when these illegal sales were publicised. The tobacco industry line on these sales was to belittle the surveys for their use of *agents provocateurs*, as if that invalidated the results, shoot the (public health) messenger and talk about the near immaculate probity of everyone in the tobacco trade, with just "a tiny minority" spoiling it all. A tiny minority? Perhaps it should not have surprised anyone outside the industry, knowing its lack of integrity with science, that 80% could be so described.

But times have changed. Not only has Scotland's semi-devolved government toughened the law, raising the minimum age for sales from 16 to 18 years old, but the public perception of smoking has undergone a sea change. The disappearance of virtually all tobacco promotion, from a situation where every retailer's shop window used to be festooned with colour cigarette ads, together with the abolition of smoking in all public places and a constant decline in smoking prevalence, have together dealt the sort of body blow the industry most fears to the social acceptability of smoking.

The latest survey of illegal sales has found that a third of retailers tested sold cigarettes to underage customers. Rightly, commentators from health agencies said this was still far too high, as did trading standards officers, who have recently visited every cigarette outlet in Scotland to explain the law, itself a welcome addition to efforts to improve compliance. But, as in many of the more complex areas of tobacco control policy, in the absence of constant official enforcement, such practices take time to change and a reduction from eight out of 10 to one out of three retailers offending must be greeted as welcome progress.