France: rolling round the curbs

The French Tobacco Act (the “loi Evin”) has led to the price of manufactured cigarettes doubling since 1992, and to sales decreasing 14.5% from 1991 to 1997. But during the same period, sales of roll-your-own tobacco (RYO) have doubled, because of their lower level of taxation. This phenomenon mainly concerns young people: almost 24% of 12 to 24 year olds say they smoke roll ups, against 17.7% for the overall population aged 12 to 75. These facts may explain why RYO papers have recently developed strong efforts to gain new customers.

Since the total ad ban came into force in 1993, traditional ways of advertising tobacco products have disappeared, including most indirect ads, the latter mainly disappearing as a result of 37 punitive sentences handed out over the last 10 years (details of French case law can be found at www.tabac-info.net).

Conversely, RYO cigarette papers, which are not covered by the law, have become more and more visible. In 1998, OCB (Odet Cascadec Bolloré), recently sold by the French company Bolloré Technologies to the US Republic Technologies, initiated a large media campaign targeting teenagers, using outdoor and printed ads mainly in magazines. On its website (www.ocb.tm.com), OCB uses images of famous actors (Samy Naceri, star of “Taxi”), singers (Zazie, especially popular with young girls), and models (Pauline) as their ambassadors. The brand uses sexy, glamorous, and fashionable imagery, along with values such as humour, impertinence, multicultural openness, provocation, refusing conventional values, breaking the law, and sharing the joyful moments in life.

In addition to these marketing strategies, the intention to target young people is confirmed by the media planning (magazines on movies and music), and by the proactive presence of the brand at a popular music festival at Veillères-Charrures in Brittany, which is seen by young people as the “Breton Woodstock”. In addition, fearing the coming of stricter legislation, the “OCB Urban Wear Designed by you” competition was launched towards the end of last year, also using the same sort of communications. OCB’s competitor RIZLA, while using less provocative ads, is also using a similar media campaign strategy.

It is striking how the RYO papers industry seems to follow the strategy of the cigarette manufacturers. These campaigns keep on showing positive images of smokers who are “cool”, “hip” and “glamorous”, and such messages unfortunately have a strong impact in a country where advertisements for manufactured cigarettes have been absent from the media for almost a decade.

KARINA ODDOUX
Comité français d’éducation pour la santé, Vanves cedex, France
karina.oddoux@cfes.sante.fr

PASCAL MELIHAN-CHEININ
Ligue Nationale Contre le Cancer, Paris, France

Oman: ships that pass in the night

Fresh from its narrow escape after encountering unforecast publicity storms in Pakistan (see Tobacco Control 2000; 9:361), BAT’s John Player Gold Leaf ocean going sailing boat slipped silently into a private marina in Oman on 8 November, and slipped just as silently out again three days later. No hyped-up mass media publicity, no parties, or discos. Not a free sample in sight, even for “young adults”. A local agent arranged for some media personnel to meet the boat and its intrepid crew, but a subsequent search of newspapers and other media indicated that the boat had, as it were, sunk without trace.

Health officials in the Gulf sultanate believe that the distinctly low key nature of the visit was the result of strong pressure on municipal
News analysis

authorities and the Ministry of Commerce not to grant the floating cigarette ad any promotional permits, as well as official representations to government owned newspapers. Nevertheless, the incident has renewed their conviction of the need for comprehensive legislation, to ensure that next time, tobacco companies do not even bother trying it on.

Brazil: tough nut cracked

Brazil is the world’s fifth largest country, with a vibrant economy and a vast, impressionable, fashion conscious youth population. What better place to sell cigarettes? “There’s an awful lot of starters in Brazil” might be the modern parody of the old song about coffee, this one possibly sung by officials of British American Tobacco’s (BAT) local subsidiary Souza Cruz, which dominates the market. For many years it has been laughing all the way to the bank with the spoils from such strikingly promotion friendly brands as Hollywood.

So it comes as all the more of a surprise, and a tonic to weary tobacco control advocates everywhere, that last November, the Senate passed a tobacco advertising ban, covering ads on television and radio, and in newspapers and magazines, and outdoor billboards and merchandising. The new law also prohibits tobacco sponsorship of sports and cultural events, with a two year grace period to end sponsorship contracts. While the bill was due to return to the lower house of parliament for ratification of certain alterations made during its passage through the senate at the time of writing, it was expected to pass into law within a matter of weeks. It can be done, as a pioneering Norwegian might put it.

USA: bad housekeeping

Decent. As American as motherhood and apple pie. That’s how one could view Good Housekeeping, the leading women’s home and family oriented monthly magazine of good, sensible, responsible articles and advice about the whole range of issues facing modern American families. Even the title sounds like something that you might have found, probably near the family bible, inside the bare but clean front room of every decent settler’s home.

At the front of the November 2000 edition, beside a photograph of the editor, was a trailer for what was rightly billed as “a groundbreaking story about women and lung cancer that you’re unlikely to read elsewhere”. It began: “In December 1952, Good Housekeeping stopped accepting ads for cigarettes and tobacco products. At the time, research was just beginning to emerge about the link between smoking and lung cancer, and the editors believed that advertisements for a potentially harmful product were inconsistent with the magazine’s consumer safety policy. That decision, almost 50 years ago, puts us in a unique position to report…” (the groundbreaking story). Flip through the pages of Good Housekeeping as long as you like, and you will certainly not see a cigarette advertisement. But turn to page 76 in the November edition and there you will find a full page colour ad from Philip Morris as Hollywood.

The Philip Morris advertisement in the November 2000 edition of “Good Housekeeping”.

to obviously responsible and well meaning institutions such as Good Housekeeping? Perhaps a start would be for a major education plan to tell them how the industry has been planning its rehabilitation for quite some time. While health advocates were still fooling themselves that after what came out in the Minnesota documents, not even tobacco executives would ever again pretend to be anything other than scheming liars and fixers of bogus research, they were busy panning the next chapter.

In 1991, a Tobacco Institute discussion paper on the industry’s youth programme set out a “fairly simple” strategy: 1. Heavily promote industry opposition to youth smoking. 2. Align industry with broader, more sophisticated view of the problem—that is, parental inability to offset peer pressure. 3. Work with and through credible child welfare professionals and educators to tackle the “problem”. 4. Bait anti-tobacco forces to criticise industry efforts.

The Good Housekeeping ad neatly exemplifies 1 and 2, and may possibly lead to 3. By writing about it this way, Tobacco Control may, as the industry sees it, be falling headlong into 4—unless major public health efforts go into getting the wider world to see what is really going on.

Turkey: Philip Morris’s “youth programme” gets adult response

More good news from Turkey, just a few months after health advocates saw off, at least for the time being, the latest round in a covert attempt by the tobacco industry to establish Formula One motor sport in the soccer dominated country for the purposes of future cigarette promotion (see Tobacco Control 2000;9:268–9). Once again it features Philip Morris, whose initial success at collaboration with a prestigious university in Istanbul was one of the nastiest surprises of last year. Philip Morris approached Bosphorus University last September, with a project called “Power is Yours” targeting sixth and seventh grade (approximately 12 and 13 years old) students in Istanbul schools.

When the university asked—and received—permission from the Ministry of Education to implement the scheme, it somehow forgot to mention the name of the sponsor. However,
when the generous backer’s name
came to light later, journalists and
international health advocates began
to contact the dean of the university,
urging him to abandon the scheme.
National publicity was generated,
bringing the matter to the attention of
no less a public health guardian than
the father of Turkey’s tobacco control
legislation, the country’s president
(see Tobacco Control 1997;6:10–11).
He asked the Ministry of Education to
explain how the project had been per-
mitted, and the next thing we know,
hey presto, the Ministry of Education
stopped it as dead in its tracks as a
Marlboro smoker falling down with a
heart attack.

So far as we know, this is the first
time that one of the industry’s
wretched “youth education” pro-
grammes has been stopped after
getting underway, and the reassuring
lesson is that it is never too late to
protest. And encouragingly, Turkish
colleagues report that every new trick
that tobacco companies try to
promote their business actually results
in increased public awareness about
the industry’s tactics. Let’s hope they
don’t give up trying.

Making the Maltese cross
People who care about health in Malta
were alarmed towards the end of last
year to learn who had been appointed
to the most important new job in the
country’s educational system, the
president of the board of governors of
the prestigious new Malta College of
Arts, Science and Technology. The
brand new institution is scheduled to
open early this year, with an initial
student population of 4000, an ambi-
tious target at half the size of Malta’s
university. It is intended to produce
graduates to supply the needs of
industry, thereby aiding and shaping
the future of the economy. So who is
to lead the bold new flagship college?
Step forward Mr Victor Scicluna,
president of the Malta Employers’
Association and retired boss of
Central Cigarettes Co, local subsidi-
ary of BAT. Quite where he will stand
when a cigarette company starts
distributing free, glossy materials pro-
moting cigarettes to the students, such
as those seen in the Czech Republic
(see Tobacco Control 2000;9:11–12),
remains to be seen.

USA: the name of Philip Morris to sit
on 28 million school desks
In the 1998 Master Settlement Agree-
ment, the tobacco industry agreed to
halt all marketing and promotion
activities directed at children in the
USA. Recently, however, Philip
Morris may well have found a clever
way to circumvent the spirit of this
agreement. The Philip Morris Youth
Prevention programme has been used as
a vehicle through which to expose
potentially 28 million school children
to the name of Philip Morris on a
daily basis—within the safety of their
own classrooms.

Since spring 2000, Philip Morris
has been a partner in the distribution
of colourful book covers to schools
around the USA (elementary, middle
and high schools). The Philip Morris
covers are emblazoned with the
message, “Think. Don’t Smoke”—
and the name of Philip Morris. Some
say that this youth focused initiative is
little more than thinly veiled advertis-
ing, and that the inclusion of the com-
pany name is an attempt to build
brand recognition. As ad testing
research has shown, the company’s
anti-smoking messages (such as,
“Think. Don’t Smoke”) are very
weak, compared to other anti-
smoking messages produced by state
tobacco control programmes. At the
very least, these book covers nicely
supplement Philip Morris’ ongoing,
national television campaign promot-
ing the company as a good corporate
citizen.

The sponsorship of school book
covers is common practice with
companies who market to children. It
is usually seen as a win-win situation.
The school gets needed protection for
its precious resources, and children
get an average of 5.5 months exposure
to the company’s name and image.
Even better, from the viewpoint of
Philip Morris, Primedia Cover
Concepts, which distributes the book
covers, has the capability to target
particular audiences. If, for example,
a company seeks to increase its sales
among young Hispanics, suitable
schools can be identified for
distribution of the relevant covers.
The criteria by which schools were
chosen to receive Philip Morris covers
is not clear and may not have been a
random process.