LETTERS

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.

Listening between the lines: what BAT really thinks of its consumers in the developing world

In an audio recording of the “Structured Creativity Conference” held in Hampshire, UK in June 1984, British American Tobacco (BAT) adds context to the written report of marketing and product applications. Employees are taped brainstorming creative ways to push their product in light of future marketing constraints and social pressure towards a smoke-free society. Project proposals included the: “side stream smoke cigarette,” “front end” cigarette design to give the smoker more “impact” on the first puff, pleasant smelling side stream smoke, and “urban”, “male”, between 18–30, and “aspirers . . .they’re not going to go for it.” This leads to the obvious question: Are we overlooking important research tools in the form of non-written material?

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References

Eclipse: does it live up to its health claims?

We read the recent article by Slade et al1 with great interest and agree that reasonable regulation focused on the development and appropriate evaluation of potential reduced risk cigarettes is warranted. Furthermore, we agree with Slade et al2 that the results of our evaluation indicate that Eclipse may offer material benefits to smokers. However, we disagree with several of the other conclusions drawn by the authors.

The article challenges the merits of Eclipse and questions the fundamental differences between Eclipse and other cigarettes. It is not possible within the context of this letter either to fully describe the scientific data that has been developed to characterise Eclipse or to address many of the criticisms of Eclipse raised in Slade’s article. However, we briefly address pertinent issues below and encourage interested parties to independently evaluate all of the available information.

Slade et al3 have inaccurately represented the claims that RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company (RJRT) has made regarding Eclipse. No cigarette is without risk, including Eclipse. Our advertising for Eclipse states: “The best choice for smokers who worry about their health is to quit. But Eclipse is the next best choice for those who have decided to continue smoking.” Our advertising also makes it clear that RJRT does not claim that Eclipse presents less risk of cardiovascular disease or complications with pregnancy.

In the absence of any existing regulatory standard, RJRT assessed Eclipse’s risk reduction potential using a four step scientific methodology that included chemical testing and analysis, biological and toxicological testing, human testing, and independent scientific verification. In general, the evaluation strategy utilised was consistent with strategies outlined by the Institute of Medicine Committee that addressed this subject.4 RJRT has conducted an extensive comparative evaluation of Eclipse and has presented this research at scientific meetings in the both the USA and internationally. The results of these and other studies may be reviewed on the Eclipse website (www.eclipsescience.com).

In addition, much of this research has been published in the peer reviewed literature. The weight of the evidence from this research clearly shows that, compared to other cigarettes, Eclipse may present smokers with less risk of cancer, chronic bronchitis, and possibly emphysema. An independent panel of scientific experts reviewed the science and reached conclusions consistent with RJRT’s claims.5

RJRT’s comparative studies were conducted using Kentucky reference cigarettes (K1RF and K1MF) and leading low “tar” and ultra low “tar” commercial brand styles. Combined, the cigarettes selected for comparison to Eclipse are representative of the vast majority of cigarettes sold in the US market.6 By contrast, the entire market segment of the very low yielding ultra low “tar” cigarettes sold by Slade et al as a comparison collectively represent less than 1% of the market. Furthermore, one of the two cigarettes selected as a comparison (Now Box) does not have a measurable US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) “tar” yield.

PostScript
Comparisons of Eclipse mainstream smoke constituent yields to the yields of very
yielding ultra low “tar” cigarettes (Now Box and Carlton Soft Pack) obtained by machine
smoking conditions. RJR scientists have recently demonstrated Eclipse is signifi-
cantly less mutagenic than Now Box when evaluated using the machine smoking conditions
tested and was less mutagenic than Now Box when evaluated using the machine smoking conditions
mandated by both the Massachusetts Department of Health and the Canadian federal
administration. In addition, Eclipse was significantly
less cytotoxic on both a per mg “tar” basis and a per cigarette basis under the same range of
machine smoking conditions.

As noted by Slade et al., smokers typically take larger and more frequent puffs than those specified by the US Federal Trade Commis-
sion puffing regimen and they typically smoke Eclipse differently than their usual brands. Therefore, it is essential that a weight-
of-the-evidence approach, including studies in smokers, be used to characterise potential differences between Eclipse and other cigarettes.1 Urine mutagenicity studies con-
ducted in smokers demonstrate that smokers of ultra low “tar”, full flavour low “tar”, and full flavour “tar” cigarettes all experience sub-
stantial, statistically significant reductions (p < 0.05, from mutation exposure when they switch to Eclipse.” Furthermore, additional studies conducted in smokers have demon-
strated reductions in bronchial inflammation and inflammation of the lower lung when smokers switched to Eclipse.22 These find-
ings are consistent with reductions in smoker exposure to smoke constituents under actual smoking conditions and support RJRT’s con-
clusion that Eclipse may reduce some of the risks of certain smoking related diseases relative to
other cigarettes currently on the market.

Author’s reply

Swauger argues that based on the weight of the evidence, Eclipse, compared to other ciga-
rettes, may present smokers with less risk of cancer and other smoking related diseases. He bases this conclusion on “weighing” the scientific research RJ Reynolds Tobacco (RJRT) has conducted on Eclipse. Our study drew the opposite conclusion. Our analysis of the Eclipse research suggests that Eclipse is as toxic or more toxic than a number of conven-
tional cigarette brands.

RJRT claims “there is no cigarette like Eclipse” based on a comparison of the smoke chemistry of Eclipse with a typical ultralight, Merit. We tested Eclipse against two other ultralight cigarettes, Now and Carlton, and found the smoke concentrations of four major carcinogens to be similar in this study. This finding is consistent with other research. RJRT’s claim that “there is no cigarette like Eclipse” may be misleading to consumers.

We tried to “weigh” the evidence but found that it is difficult since the control cigarettes kept changing between the studies. The smoke chemistry research used a commercial “ultralight” as a reference, the in vitro research a Kentucky “light” cigarette and the human research the tobacco brand of heart disease (40 + cigarettes per day) smokers. The “usual” brands were not identified. We also examined changes in smoke chemistry between the 1996 version of Eclipse and the 2000 version and found that concentration of four major carcinogens doubled in the 2000
version. The concentration of NNK was 123% greater than RJRT’s early 1988 version of Eclipse called Premier.

In 2001, the Institute of Medicine’s report “Clear the Air” determined that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that new or low “tar” cigarettes present less risk than conventional cigarettes. These include Omni, Advance, Accord, and a soon to be released Philip Mor-
ris product called SCOR. Our study highlights the need for regulation of these products and associa-
ted claims by independent agencies such as the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). RJRT could help “Clear the Air” by supporting pending FDA legislation. Food and
drug manufacturers are not allowed to intro-
duce new products into the market and make claims based solely on their own internal research, and nor should tobacco manufactur-
ers. RJRT truly believes that Eclipse may reduc-
reduce risks of lung cancer and other diseases, the company should request the FDA to evaluate its scientific research and claims before marketing it at the retail level nationally.

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Seasonality in cigarette sales: patterns and implications for tobacco control

Cigarette smoking is the leading public health problem in the USA, contributing to over 400 000 deaths a year.1 Given its importance, the tobacco control community should be aware of all significant patterns in the consumption of cigarettes and related products. Recently, there has been a substantial increase in the awareness of seasonality in tobacco sales. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to the seasonal nature of smoking. Findings on seasonal patterns may have major implica-
tions for the timing of interventions designed to manage the tobacco problem, both in the USA and in other countries.2

In this letter, monthly data for cigarette sales at the state level for the USA are analysed to test for the presence of seasonality and to characterise the phenomenon. The results reveal a seasonal pattern that is significant both in the statistical sense and in magnitude. This includes a significant drop in the winter months of January and February, and an increase during the summer months of June, July, and August.3 Because seasonality in sales does not reflect seasonality in pro-
duction, it must be inferred that the season-

Reference

1 Slade J, Connolly GN, Lyperis D. Eclipse: does it live up to its health claims? Tobacco Control 2002;11(supp II):i64–70.
Two methods were used to examine seasonality. The first was spectral analysis, which identifies cyclical patterns in the data. If a cycle of a particular length is revealed to be important, then a systematic phenomenon identifies cyclical patterns in the data. If a cycle, indicating seasonality. In addition, for 46 out of the 51 locations studied, the cycle, a seasonal factor range of –0.4, a 30% drop in sales would require a 75% increase in cigarette prices!

Next, to identify the months for which sales were uniformly high or low for any state, for any one year cycle in the data, the two months with the highest and the two with the lowest seasonal components were selected, and the frequency of the appearance of the months in the “high-2” and “low-2” months was computed by state. Columns 5–8 show the most frequently appearing high and low months. In percentage terms, the seasonal effect is large—column 4 shows, the mean annual range (difference between high and low factors) across the 17 years is about 30%. To put this in perspective, assuming a price elasticity of –0.4, a 30% drop in sales would require a 75% increase in cigarette prices!

In the case of seasonality, a cycle of period 12 months would stand out, and the spectrogram was significantly (5% level) different from that produced by a uniform random process (Bartlett’s test). The first was spectral analysis, which identifies cyclical patterns in the data. If a cycle, indicating seasonality. In addition, for 46 out of the 51 locations studied, the cycle, a seasonal factor range of –0.4, a 30% drop in sales would require a 75% increase in cigarette prices!

Two methods were used to examine seasonality. The first was spectral analysis, which identifies cyclical patterns in the data. If a cycle of a particular length is revealed to be important, then a systematic phenomenon identifies cyclical patterns in the data. If a cycle, indicating seasonality. In addition, for 46 out of the 51 locations studied, the cycle, a seasonal factor range of –0.4, a 30% drop in sales would require a 75% increase in cigarette prices!

Second, the time series were seasonally decomposed. This involved splitting the series into trend, seasonal, and irregular components. Using the seasonality analysis, a number of indicators were generated. The p values in table 1, column 3 correspond to the null hypotheses of no stable seasonality in sales. At a significance level of 5%, the null hypothesis of no seasonality is rejected for all the states.

In percentage terms, the seasonal effect is large—column 4 shows, the mean annual range (difference between high and low factors) across the 17 years is about 30%. To put this in perspective, assuming a price elasticity of –0.4, a 30% drop in sales would require a 75% increase in cigarette prices!
The present findings demonstrate that sales of cigarettes in the USA have a strong seasonal component. This has potential implications for the timing of cessation initiatives and other time-dependent policies. The phenomenon of seasonality could hold the key to significant advances in tobacco control and in the management of a leading public health problem.

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References
2 Tobacco Institute, The tax burden on tobacco: historical compilation. Various volumes. Washington DC: The Tobacco Institute, various years.

Way-out developments at BATCO
Working in tobacco control, it is easy to get the impression that the tobacco industry is a united front, with all parties carefully avoiding internal divisions that might undermine the greater struggle against the “antis.” However, tobacco industry documents that have been made public as a result of litigation in the USA frequently reveal ruthless competition for market share, as well as intense suspicion about competitors’ activities. This was brought home to us recently when reading a 1977 document on “developments in the scientific field” by Dr Sydney J Green, then British American Tobacco’s (BAT’s) senior scientist for research and development.1 After several pages of unremarkable reports on industry and external research on low tar cigarettes and smoking and health, Green informed his readers about two “way-out” developments at BAT:

• Way-out development 1: “A way-out development is that of compounds (such as etorphine) which are 10,000 times as effective as analgesics [such as] morphine and which are very addictive. It is theoretically possible (if politically unthinkable) to add analytically undetectable quantities of such materials to cigarettes to create brand allegiance. But this thought may suggest the possibility of such compounds occurring naturally.”

We are grateful to Dr Green for clarifying what “brand allegiance” really means for the tobacco industry.

• Way-out development 2: “Another way-out development, which arises from work done in a quite different area, is that it would now be quite feasible and quite inexpensive to produce an unacceptable off-flavor in cigarettes from some factories for a prolonged period without approaching nearer than half to one mile.”

In the same spirit of scientific curiosity which no doubt motivated the BATCO researchers, we would be very interested to know the formula for this substance. On a more serious note, while we were not able to come up with any plausible candidates for a substance that could make way-out development 2 feasible, we are concerned that Green was right about the feasibility of adding etorphine or some other addictive substance to cigarettes.

Green’s report followed an earlier memo from Keith D Kilburn to CI Ayres,2 expressing...
concern about what BATCO's competitors might be doing to their "low delivery" cigarettes (that is, low machine measured tar and nicotine yield cigarettes) in order to create brand allegiance. Kilburn proposed that a regular etorphine dose of as little as 0.2 µg per day would be sufficient to create an addictive craving for the source. He also claimed that the required delivery of around 7 ng per cigarette (or around half the delivery of benzo[a]pyrene) would be analytically difficult to measure.

Etorphine is a powerful drug with heroin-like effects, which include respiratory failure in the case of overdose. It may be more familiar to the lay public as "elephant juice"—a veterinary drug with such high potency that a tiny quantity injected from a dart can immobilise an elephant.

The dangers of etorphine to humans have been dramatically demonstrated in accidents during veterinary use, as there have been fatal overdoses to veterinarians attempting to dart large unruly animals. Reputedly, a mere scratch from an etorphine dart has been sufficient in some cases to provide a fatal overdose. As a consequence of these fatalities, veterinarians who are registered to use etorphine must now have an assistant standing by with a dose of an etorphine antagonist in hand.

These observations on the dangers of etorphine underscore Green's and Kilburn's essential point: very low concentrations of certain psychoactive substances may be sufficient to produce important effects, including addiction. Fortunately, etorphine has become much more readily detectable in recent years than Green and Kilburn suggested was the case.

Since we could not be certain that sample selection was done properly, we had to look at sample characteristics. The prevalence of smokers was much higher than in other survey data indicating a bias in the sample.

Did the consultant's data, when extrapolated/aggregated, agree with other standard data sources—for example, government statistics? Much of the basic data collected by the consultants was not disclosed in their report but in their case, they had to present some—for example, average weekly spends in the different types of catering venues. From these data we could estimate (a) expected weekly revenue in the catering industry, (b) approximate market shares for the different types of venues, and (c) expected spend on eating out per household if the consultant's data were valid. Each of these estimates was quite implausible when compared with data from the census and other government sources.

(3) Could the consultant's findings be reproduced to shed light on the methods used? Using a subset of data based on random sampling, we tried to recreate the consultant's findings by deliberately introducing biases and incorrect aggregations which we suspected were present in the consultant's methods. In this way we were able to produce an almost identical set of results from the new data. On the other hand, when we analysed the new data in an appropriate fashion, we predicted a rise of 5% rather than a drop of nearly 11% in catering revenues. The best means of influencing policy on smoke-free venues is to use objective outcome measures and data collected both before and after the intervention, as recommended by Siegel and others. We were not able to refute would have failed Siegel's quality criteria. However, much of the lobbying against smoke-free legislation is done before such policies are put in place, local objective, before and after data are not inevitably not available. In our case, presenting our rebuttal of the consultant's findings along with the evidence accumulated from overseas studies that smoke-free policies do not harm catering industry revenues, greatly reduced the harm that the consultant's report could have done to the proposed legislative process. Our approach may be helpful to policy makers faced with a similar situation in their own locality.

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References


How to critique consultancy reports?

The recent proposals for smoke-free legislation in many countries have spawned a multitude of studies which attempt to predict the financial impact of such legislation. As described by Scollo et al. in this issue of Tobacco Control, many of these studies fail to achieve basic quality standards and this is more likely when the tobacco industry funds the study. However, findings from such flawed studies can influence policy makers and it is essential that public health advocates have strategies to counter their impact.

In Hong Kong, in 2001, the government proposed to make all workplaces, including catering venues, smoke-free.¹ A consultancy report for the catering industry, funded by the tobacco industry, was published shortly after and concluded that the legislation would cause catering industry revenues to drop by 10.6% leading to job losses. This report was based on a survey of customers to catering venues, self reported spend on eating and drinking outside, and self predicted changes in the event that catering venues were made smoke-free. Since the methods used were not made clear in the report, we had to attempt to validate or refute the report mainly by an assessment of its findings. We found the following questions useful:

1. Was the sample used for the consultant’s survey representative of the population being studied (customers of catering venues)? Since we could not be certain that sample selection was done properly, we had to look at sample characteristics. The prevalence of smokers was much higher than in other survey data indicating a bias in the sample.

2. Did the consultant’s data, when extrapolated/aggregated, agree with other standard data sources—for example, government statistics? Much of the basic data collected by the consultants was not disclosed in their report but in their case, they had to present some—for example, average weekly spends in the different types of catering venues. From these data we could estimate (a) expected weekly revenue in the catering industry, (b) approximate market shares for the different types of venue, and (c) expected spend on eating out per household if the consultant’s data were valid. Each of these estimates was quite implausible when compared with data from the census and other government sources.

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Interest in nicotine replacement therapy among pregnant smokers

In the UK nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) may now be considered for those pregnant women who cannot otherwise stop smoking.¹ However, very little research has been carried out with NRT during pregnancy and the level of interest in using NRT is not known.² This letter reports the results of a survey to assess the level of interest in using NRT among pregnant smokers.

Across a seven month period pregnant smokers were identified using the patient administration system of a large district general hospital in south west London. Ethical approval was obtained and participants gave verbal consent via the reception desk. Identified as smokers at their first antenatal booking visit were telephoned within one week of this visit and invited to take part in the survey. The interview took place during the initial telephone call or during a further call within 48 hours of the initial call. All statistical tests were two tailed.

Demographic information was obtained from patient records. All the women were asked “Can I just check, are you still smoking at the moment?” (“yes” or “no”). Those still smoking were asked “About how many a day would you say you are smoking at the moment?”, and “Are you thinking at all about giving up?” (“yes” or “no”). Those expressing an interest in stopping were asked “Do you think you might want to stop in the next month, or might you prefer to try a bit later on?” and “Would you be interested in receiving some help from the hospital with stopping?” (“yes” or “no”). Women stating an interest in receiving help were asked “Some forms of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) may now be used by pregnant smokers who feel they wouldn’t be able to stop without it. Would you choose to use NRT to help you to stop smoking?” (“yes” or “no”).

Of the 207 smokers interviewed (fig 1) the majority were in professional/manorial occupations (85.0%, 176/207), and attended their first antenatal booking in the hospital (66.7%, 138/207) rather than in the community. The mean (SD) duration of pregnancy was 18.6 (5.6) weeks and the mean (SD) reported number of cigarettes smoked per day was 7.3 (6.1).

Of those women reporting that they were thinking about stopping smoking 44.7% (67/ 150) expressed an interest in using NRT. Interest in NRT was higher among women who reported smoking more cigarettes per day (analysis of variance (ANOVA); F = 7.6,
p = 0.006; mean (SD) cigarettes a day: interested in NRT (n = 67) = 9.5 (6.3), not interested in NRT (n = 83) = 7.1 (4.2). Following current licensing regulations, 39.3% (59/150) of the women wanting to stop smoking reported sufficient cigarettes per day (≥10) to be considered eligible for NRT. Interest in using NRT was significantly higher for those smoking at least 10 cigarettes a day (χ²; p = 0.03; 10 or more cigarettes a day: interested in NRT = 55.9% (33/59), less than 10 cigarettes a day: interested in NRT = 37.4% (34/91)). Overall, 22% (33/150) of those reporting wanting to stop smoking were both interested in NRT and eligible for NRT.

The results indicate a high level of interest in stopping smoking among pregnant women still smoking following their first antenatal booking and a moderate level of interest in using NRT. Fewer women were recorded as smokers at their first antenatal visit than would be expected from national data. This is likely to be because of the high number of Asian women in the local population. Encouragingly, those women who were heavier smokers, and were therefore eligible for NRT, showed most interest in NRT. Around a quarter of the smokers wanting to stop were both eligible for NRT and interested in using NRT. These findings add support to the argument for conducting further trials of NRT for pregnant smokers. The ultimate test of the acceptability of NRT for these women will be the degree to which NRT is utilised.

Voodoo cigarillos: bids in disguise?

As part of its routine monitoring of emerging tobacco products, “Trinkets & trash: artifacts of the tobacco epidemic”, a collection of current and historic tobacco marketing (www.trinketsandtrash.org), recently identified a new tobacco product called Voodoo cigarillos. They are exclusively manufactured in India for the US based Kretek International, a subsidiary tobacco distributor whose exclusive product line includes Djarum clove cigarettes, Darshan bids, and Dreams multi-coloured and flavoured cocktail cigarettes. The Voodoo cigarillos we obtained were flavoured and, as with bids, consisted of tobacco flakes wrapped in a leaf tied with a small string. Aside from a slightly larger and more uniform cylindrical shape, Voodoo cigarillos appear to be nearly identical to bids (fig 1). Only the name on the package would identify it as a cigarilla. US federal regulations define a cigar as any roll of tobacco wrapped in leaf tobacco or in any substance containing tobacco. Voodoo cigarillos appear to be wrapped in tendu leaf, which do not naturally contain tobacco.

So, we ask, is this new product a cigarilla or a bid with new packaging? Federal regulations define a cigar as any roll of tobacco wrapped in paper or in any substance not containing tobacco. The US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms previously concluded the cigarilla did not contain tobacco and, therefore, bids were subject to the federal cigarette tax.

The distinction between a cigarilla and a cigarette has important legal and financial implications. Since the wrapper of a cigarilla contains tobacco, cigarillas are taxed at the same rate as small cigars. In 2002, the US federal tax rate for small cigars was 4 cents per pack of 20, while the rate for cigarettes was 39 cents per pack of 20.7 While all 50 states impose a tax on cigarettes, only 45 states impose a tax on cigarillas, which are lower than their cigarette tax. If Voodoo cigarillas are taxed at the rate of cigars, the lower federal and state taxes mean a higher profit margin for the merchant and/or lower prices for consumers.

In addition to tax differences, labelling the Voodoo product as a cigarilla has important consequences for their regulation. Several states have expanded their definition of tobacco products to include bids, making sales to minors illegal. Illinois, Vermont, and West Virginia have banned the sale of bids completely. More recently, California passed a bill prohibiting the sale, distribution or importation of bids except by businesses that prohibit minors, such as bars and casinos. Also, federal legislation to halt the importation of bids into the USA was introduced in 2001.8 By being sold as a cigar product, US-based cigarillas would get around the ban on bidi sales in some states.

This new product emerges at a time when bidi sales are vulnerable to increased regulation at the state and possibly the federal level, as well as higher cigarette excise taxes in 19 states in 2002.9 The Voodoo cigarilla may be a clever way for the tobacco industry to circumvent the regulations and restrictions imposed on bids. Voodoo cigarillas should be reliably tested to determine if manufacturers and vendors are in compliance with federal and state laws.

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References
Smoking in children’s picture books

The other day, one of the authors went to a public library with his 3 year old daughter to read some picture books to her. Various picture books, from classic to newly published, were available. Classic books are her favourite. First, she chose a book portraying adventures of a naughty monkey named Curious George (by HA Rey). He came to an industrialised country with a man in a yellow hat. My daughter pointed to a picture of the man holding a pipe between his lips. A smoking scene in a picture book for small children!

The next book she chose depicted an elephant named Babar (by Jean De Brunhoff) that fled from his country to Europe after his mother was killed by men. After coming back to his country with western technologies, he changed elephant society into Western-style society and became a king. Again, the King Babar was holding a pipe.

The third book was depicting a monster named Barbapapa living with François’ family (by Tison and Taylor). He had a mysterious ability to metamorphose into anything he desired. Unfortunately, in this attractive book, François’ father was always holding a pipe. Another supporting character was smoking a cigar. Smoking seems to be a symbol of manhood in these children’s picture books.

My daughter then opened books about Moominvalley (by Tove Jansson) and Tintin’s adventures (by Herge) in which some characters were smoking. Finally, I myself selected a book depicting Father Christmas (by Raymond Briggs). On Christmas Eve, Father Christmas delivered presents to children all over the world. After the labourious job, he took a rest smoking a cigar and a pipe.

Picture books reflect the norms or perceptions of our societies. These classic children’s books were first published in times when smoking was not widely acknowledged as harmful and a smoking male adult was one of the sex stereotypes. In addition, pipe smoking seems acceptable in such picture books compared with cigars or cigarettes which are seldom seen.

Caregivers frequently read picture books aloud to children at home, kindergartens, or daycare centres, which may have a considerable influence on preschool children. Young children receive strong messages from pictures. Seeing adult males smoking in picture books, they may take it as a desirable behaviour.

It would be unacceptable to remove smoking scenes from these classic books or eliminate the books themselves. What we can do is to become aware of the potential influence of these books and take a negative attitude to smoking when we read to children. Fortunately, the man in a yellow hat seems to have quit smoking in the new series of George’s adventures.

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Getting them while they’re young in China. Submitted by Professor TH Lam, Hong Kong.
Smoke-filled rooms: a postmortem on the tobacco deal


Smoke and mirrors

Cigarettes are a major cause of premature death. Cigarettes are addictive. Secondhand smoke can be annoying, but is really not enough of a health risk to justify banning smoking in indoor environments. Payments to states in the Master Settlement Agreement were unjustified since cigarettes are self-financing. States actually save money because smokers die young. Lawsuits against the tobacco industry are without merit, since smokers have long known about the health risks. Continuing efforts to warn the public about the health risks of smoking are unnecessary. Although there are some risks, filters and low tar cigarettes are far less toxic. Smoking has not been shown to cause cancer. On the contrary, smoking reduces cancer risk. Manufacturers of filtered and low tar cigarettes are not responsible for the premature deaths of smokers. Instead, the government needs to do more to encourage cigarette manufacturers to produce a less toxic cigarette.

The government should focus on giving smokers information about the risks posed by different types of cigarettes, which would foster much-needed competition in the development of safer cigarettes while at the same time preserving individual choice.

Such are the views expressed by Harvard Law Professor W Kip Viscusi in his new book entitled Smoked-filled rooms. If cigarette smoking hasn’t already caused one to become short of breath, reading this book surely will. Viscusi’s selective presentation of data on what constitutes public awareness that smoking causes cancer is breathtaking. This book leaves one with the impression that the cigarette industry and not the American public has been the victim in what has been a massive money grab by greedy trial lawyers and the biased and starved state attorneys general. It appears that Dr Viscusi has spent a few too many hours in smoked filled rooms to be able to reasonably separate fact from fiction. However, one fact is crystal clear—Viscusi is not the unbiased observer of the tobacco industry. He acknowledges that he has served as an expert witness for the cigarette industry. His book shows the common trait of the tobacco industry bears no responsibility for marketing what is admittedly a lethal and addictive product that results in the premature death of one out of every two users. Viscusi dismisses the evidence that the cigarette industry bears no responsibility for marketing what is admittedly a lethal and addictive product that results in the premature death of one out of every two users. Viscusi dismisses the evidence that the cigarette industry bears no responsibility for marketing what is admittedly a lethal and addictive product that results in the premature death of one out of every two users.

Viscusi’s sharp criticism of current public health campaigns to warn the public about the health risks of smoking defies common sense. According to Viscusi, since public health awareness of the health risks of smoking are nearly universal, there is no need to keep repeating these messages. In fact he argues that such efforts are counterproductive because people are likely to form unrealistic risk perceptions about smoking. Such reasoning is illogical. By analogy, if one were to accept Viscusi’s premise that once the public recognizes the health risks of smoking there is no need to reinforce health messages, then one would also have to accept the idea that there is no need to spend a dime advertising Marlboro cigarettes since the Marlboro Man is nearly universally recognised. Apparently, cigarette manufacturers don’t accept Viscusi’s logic and nor would the public.

In summary, Smoked-filled rooms reads more like a legal brief written by a team of tobacco industry lawyers instead of a thoughtful commentary on the legal, financial, and social consequences of smoking. As such this book is a must read for plaintiffs’ attorneys, but for the rest of us we should stick with “smoke-free rooms”.

K M Cummings

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Disclosure

K Michael Cummings is not an unbiased observer of Dr Viscusi’s research and writings. He has served as a paid expert witness on behalf of plaintiffs counsel in several of the same cases in which Dr Viscusi also served as an expert for the cigarette industry. Dr Cummings is currently employed as a senior research scientist and is chairman of the Department of Health Behavior in the Division of Cancer Prevention and Population Sciences at the Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York, USA. His salary support comes primarily from Roswell Park Cancer Institute and from research funding provided by the National Cancer Institute, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the American Legacy Foundation, and New York State Department of Health. Dr Cummings serves on the medical advisory board for the Flight Attendant Medical Research Institute (FAMRI) and has served on various scientific advisory boards and grant review committees for National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Cancer Society, Canadian National Cancer Institute, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and state and local health agencies for which he has received honoraria. Dr Cummings has also received honoraria and has accepted hospitality and on a few occasions, travel costs, from pharmaceutical companies making tobacco dependence treatment products.

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