Eclipse: does it live up to its health claims?

We read the recent article by Slade et al. with great interest and agree that reasonable regulation focused on the development and appropriate evaluation of potentially reduced risk cigarettes is warranted. Furthermore, we agree with Slade et al. that the results of our evaluation indicate that Eclipse may offer potential 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 characterize 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 al. 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 is riskless or free of cardiovascular disease or complications with pregnancy.

In the absence of any existing regulatory standard, RJRT assumed 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 utilized was consistent with strategies outlined by the Institute of Medicine Committee that addressed this subject.

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.

RJRT’s comparative studies were conducted using Kentucky reference cigarettes (K1RF and K1RF4) 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.** By contrast the entire market segment of the very low yielding ultra low “tar” cigarettes used 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.

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LETTERS

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 “sidestreaming” of low sidestream smoke cigarettes, “front end lift” cigarette design to give the smoker more “impact” on the first puff, pleasant smelling sidestream smoke, and “urban”, “male”, between 18–30, and “aspirational” cigarette for you dirt poor little black farmer… “Forget about smoking…GO FOR A QUICKIE!!! No tar withnic, is what makes the body kick.”

One of the most interesting proposals came from Ian Ross from a Finland subsidiary, who later became the head of international brand business at BATCO in the early 1990s. Ross’s proposal, the “LDC (less developed counties) Project,” called for individually heated sealed cigarettes designed to lengthen the shelf life of cigarettes in arid climates found in Africa and the Middle East. This rather ingenious idea for stick sales would be sold to tobacco vendors in reels with visible brand imaging, containing 200 cigarettes that could be pulled off along perforations one at a time.

What the 80 or so page written report did not include, the audiostream captured with clarity. The taped conversations of the BAT conference participants offered rarely obtained loose discourse regarding product design proposals and a derogatory discussion of the people intended for end product use. Ross relays that he wants to make “stick purchases seem like a consumer benefit” by supplying “factory sealed and factory freshness” every time. As for marketing the heat sealed stick product, Ross states: “[I]The brand image must be enhanced by the new packaging. If you just say, this is a cheap cigarette for you dirt poor black farmers…they’re not going to go for it.”

Ross also discusses the target group—“urban”, “male”, between 18–30, and “aspirational lower middle” socioeconomic class—and says: “I have not gone into psychographics…I have no idea what the psychographics of the average black farmer is.”

Another conference participant ruminates, “We could sell them to the Palestinians if we made the plastic hard enough that you could rip the end off and put your shells in them…”

This discourse, not found on the written presentation, between the BAT marketing and product development personnel was obviously not meant for public consumption, nor is it new information that the tobacco industry targets the developing world. A patent search in the UK resulted in no individually heat sealed cigarette applications.

What is of great interest to those of us who spend our time searching through pages of internal tobacco industry documents is the significant difference between what is written and what is said. David Schechter, the former BAT lawyer, recently explained the “mental copy rule” to the US Department of Justice, which assumed that anything one wrote could end up being used publicly or legally against the company. This leads to the obvious question: Are we overlooking important research tools in the form of non-written material?

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PostScript

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.
Comparisons of Eclipse mainstream smoke constituent yields to the yields of very low yielding ultra low "tar" cigarettes (Now Box and Carlton Soft Pack) obtained by machine smoking conditions. In addition, Eclipse was significantly (p < 0.05) in mutagen exposure when they were compared to the yields of very low "tar" cigarettes. In - the toxicologist – an official publication of the Society of Toxicologists and abstract issues of toxicological sciences; abstracts of the 42nd annual meeting, March 2003 (in press).


Author's reply
Swaeger argues that based on the weight of the evidence, Eclipse, compared to other cigarettes, may present smokers with less risk of cancer and other smoking related diseases. He bases his conclusion on "weighing" the scientific research RJ Reynolds Tobacco (RJRT) has conducted on Eclipse. Our study supports this conclusion. Switching to Eclipse is associated with reduced inflammation in the lower respiratory tract of heavy smokers.

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Reference


Author's reply
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Reference


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 may be inferred to underlie the pattern. 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 (table 1, column 2). This involved splitting the series into trend, seasonal, and irregular components. Using the seasonality analysis, a number of indicators were generated. The 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—as 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!

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. February appears as a “low-2” month for all but one state, and June appears as a “high-2” month for 42 states. Therefore, January and February are a “low” season for production data and discussions with an expert on the production of tobacco.

"This pattern is seemingly contrary to the popular belief that smokers tend to smoke more in winter (perhaps to keep warm) and less in summer."

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"This pattern is seemingly contrary to the popular belief that smokers tend to smoke more in winter (perhaps to keep warm) and less in summer."
The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Substance Abuse Policy Research Program of the University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

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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 now been published 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. 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-taste 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, expressing...
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. 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 out, 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 couldn't inspect the frame, we can only assume that the 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 use 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) weekly 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 new set 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 catering venues is to use objective outcome measures and data collected both before and after the intervention, as recommended by Siegel. However, in this case we were able to refute would have failed Siegel's quality criteria. However, since much of the lobbying against smoke-free legislation is done before such policies are put in place, local objective, before and after and data are 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.
The distinction between a cigarillo and a cigarette has important legal and financial implications. Since the wrapper of a cigarillo contains tobacco, cigarillos 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. 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 cigarillos 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 cigarillo has important consequences for their regulation. Several states have expanded their definition of tobacco products to include bidis, making sales to minors illegal. Illinois, Vermont, and West Virginia 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 by being sold as a cigar product. Unlabeled 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. The Voodoo cigarillo may be a clever way for the tobacco industry to circumvent the regulations and restrictions imposed on bidis. Voodoo cigarillos should be reliably tested to determine if manufacturers and vendors are in compliance with federal and state laws.

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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 unwarrented since public awareness of these risks is now universal. Filters and low tar technology have made cigarette smoking safer, but more could be done 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 more informed 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 Smoke-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 consumers know, or don’t know about the health risks of smoking, the dangers of secondhand smoke, the benefits of filtered and low tar cigarettes, and ultimately who should be held accountable for the massive death toll caused by smoking cigarettes 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 unbiassed observer of the tobacco industry. 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. Thus, his diatribe against plaintiff lawyers, some of whom have risked their own personal fortunes to shed light on the lies and deceit of the cigarette industry, seems misplaced. Viscusi ought to take a look in the mirror.

Reading this book leaves one with the impression 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 knowingly misrepresented the dangers of smoking to the American public on the grounds that smokers knew everything they needed to know about smoking in order to make an informed choice. However, one needs to question whether this assumption is correct. The evidence presented in chapter 7 to support the claim that smokers are fully informed is far from compelling. Viscusi mis-represents polling data showing that the public has long been aware of medical reports linking smoking and cancer as evidence that smokers were fully informed of health risks. He must surely recognise that having a general awareness that smoking causes cancer does not necessarily translate into a belief that one is personally at higher risk of developing cancer. In fact studies conducted by Viscusi himself demonstrate that smokers as a group are less likely to perceive health risks from smoking compared to non-smokers. He also fails to mention the knowledge deficits that many smokers have regarding compensatory smoking, the lack of benefits from smoking filtered and low tar cigarettes, and bidis. Viscusi ignores evidence revealing how cigarette manufacturers have designed their cigarettes to induce dependence on nicotine. He also conveniently ignores the data showing that most people begin their smoking careers during their teenage years when health concerns about smoking and addiction are not in the realm of consciousness.

Viscusi’s chapter on the factors involved in youth smoking behaviour represents an exercise in selective recall, laying the blame for youth smoking mainly on parents. Hardly a mention is made of the billions of dollars spent annually by cigarette companies to advertise and promote cigarettes. Viscusi also ignores the mountains of internal industry documents that openly discussed the importance of the youth market to the economic viability of the cigarette industry. Instead he accepts at face value the industry’s line that they don’t want kids to smoke. Viscusi’s remedy for the youth smoking problem is to get parents to do more to keep their kids from smoking and to enact policies to prohibit the sale of unconventional cigarettes like bidis. The discussion of bidis is especially odd since some manufacturers smoke these products; instead teenagers smoke Marlboro, Newport, and Camel. Thus, while one can hardly argue with Viscusi’s plea for better parenting, his failure to recommend stronger measures to curb how tobacco companies market their cigarettes to attract the attention of youthful smokers makes the sincerity of his recommendations suspect.

Viscusi’s chapter on the health risks associated with secondhand tobacco smoke is grossly uninformed. Much of this chapter reads like it was drawn from industry sponsored websites that have been designed to spread misinformation, downplaying the well documented scientific evidence linking secondhand smoke exposure to a wide array of health risk. Remarkably, Viscusi suggests that limits on indoor smoking are unjustified and bad for the economy because such restrictions cause smokers to consume fewer cigarettes, and, therefore, “losses accrue to society in terms of foregone taxes”. 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 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 should the public.

Viscusi’s criticism of the current wave of edgy in your face counter-advertising campaigns ignores the evidence that these programmes are actually reducing cigarette consumption. Instead of continuing these effective public health campaigns, Viscusi recommends that the government refocus its efforts towards giving smokers information about the risks posed by different types of cigarettes in the hope that this would move smokers to use less toxic cigarettes.

Viscusi is correct in noting an important deficiency of the Master Settlement Agreement that has made it difficult for new tobacco companies to enter the market, thus dampening competition for the development of potentially safer tobacco products. However, his credibility on this subject is diminished by his acceptance of the view that declining cigarette consumption in the USA since the 1960s corresponds directly to increased efforts to inform the public of the dangers of tobacco use. Viscusi’s criticism of the current wave of edgy in your face counter-advertising campaigns ignores the evidence that these programmes are actually reducing cigarette consumption. Instead of continuing these effective public health campaigns, Viscusi recommends that the government refocus its efforts towards giving smokers information about the risks posed by different types of cigarettes in the hope that this would move smokers to use less toxic cigarettes.

In summary, Smoke-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.

The lighter side

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