

RESEARCH PAPER

The Living Tomorrow Project: how Philip Morris has used a Belgian tourist attraction to promote ventilation approaches to the control of second hand smoke

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Study objective: To examine the involvement of Philip Morris in Living Tomorrow 2 and determine the rationale behind its involvement.

Design: Research was conducted through a web based search of internal tobacco industry documents made publicly available through litigation.

Main results: For approximately €1 000 000 Philip Morris (now Altria) became a co-initiator of Living Tomorrow 2, a tourist complex in Belgium that aims to demonstrate how we will be living in the future. In addition to promoting the company and its grocery products, Philip Morris is using the complex and its website to promote ventilation as a means of accommodating smokers and non-smokers in the indoor environment. Particular emphasis was placed on the bar and restaurant areas. Despite the rationale for its involvement, Philip Morris fails to acknowledge its role as a cigarette manufacturer. As a form of corporate sponsorship Philip Morris thought its involvement could evade any European tobacco advertising ban.

Conclusions: Philip Morris is using a tourist attraction to promote its views on control of second hand smoke (SHS) and accommodation of smokers and non-smokers in the indoor environment. However, ventilation does not deal with the health effects of SHS. Policymakers must be cognisant of the devious tactics the industry employs to promote its own agenda, especially in relation to indoor air quality and smoking in public places. Tobacco control legislation should be continually modified and strengthened in response to the changing activities of the tobacco industry as it strives to evade existing legislation and deter the advent of new legislation.

This article examines the role Philip Morris (now renamed Altria) has played in the development of Living Tomorrow 2, a tourist complex on the outskirts of Brussels, Belgium, that aims to demonstrate how we will be living and working in the future. It reveals how Philip Morris used the project to promote ventilation approaches to the control of second hand smoke (SHS), thereby attempting to prevent the development of smoke-free workplaces and public places.

The creation of smoke-free workplaces and public places is a highly effective means of preventing exposure to SHS, reducing cigarette consumption, and undermining the social acceptability of smoking.¹ Such measures therefore remain a key concern for the tobacco industry, who fear the effects they would have on profitability.^{2–3} As early as 1978 the tobacco industry identified the health effects of SHS as “the most dangerous development yet to the viability of the tobacco industry”.⁴ It has responded by attempting to undermine the science demonstrating the impact of SHS,^{5–10} framing acceptance of SHS as “tolerance”, and promoting the use of ventilation as a solution^{11–14} despite evidence that ventilation does not protect against the health impacts of SHS.^{15–16} A recent European Commission study concluded that efforts to reduce indoor air pollution (with special emphasis on SHS) through higher ventilation rates in buildings would hardly impact on indoor air quality, as “wind tunnel-like rates” of ventilation would be required to achieve pollutant levels close to ambient air limit values.¹⁷

Although Europe has been relatively slow to enact smoke-free policies, the tobacco industry has become increasingly concerned about the possibility of European restrictions.¹⁸ Philip Morris has responded by developing strategies to delay action in this area.^{19–21} These focus on maintaining the social

acceptability of smoking and promoting policies based on accommodation—a term used by the industry to refer to the accommodation of smokers and non-smokers in a shared environment.¹⁸ As part of its 1998 Worldwide Accommodation Plan Philip Morris aimed “to develop and promote programs that support accommodation and the role of ventilation in strategic public settings” and listed involvement in the Living Tomorrow 2 complex in Brussels as a way of achieving this.¹¹

As the world community seeks to strengthen tobacco control legislation and encourage the development of smoke-free public places, it is important that policymakers are aware of the tactics the industry employs to prevent smoke-free legislation and enhance the social acceptability of smoking.

METHODS

We undertook this research by examining Philip Morris' internal documents, available on the internet as a result of two legal settlements, the Minnesota Consent Judgement and the Master Settlement Agreement.^{22–23}

We searched the documents between May 2003 and July 2003 on the following tobacco document websites: Philip Morris www.pmdocs.com; Tobacco Documents Online www.tobaccodocuments.org; Legacy Tobacco Document Library <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu>. Our initial search included the following terms specific to Living Tomorrow 2: living tomorrow, living tomorrow 2, livtom, livtom2, lt, lt2. Following the initial search of documents, other keywords (including the names of mentioned individuals and companies) were also

Abbreviations: EU, European Union; HBI, Healthy Buildings International; HVAC, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; SHS, second hand smoke

used as search terms. Once relevant documents had been found, we then searched the entire file to which that document belonged in order to identify further documents. In total, we identified 24 tobacco industry documents relating to Living Tomorrow 2.

Additional searches were made of Philip Morris' and Living Tomorrow's websites to provide further information on the project. Searches of the internet were undertaken to identify media coverage and a visit was made to the Living Tomorrow 2 site to confirm the details reported in the documents.

RESULTS

What is Living Tomorrow 2?

Situated on the outskirts of Brussels, Belgium, Living Tomorrow 2 is a complex open to the public and promoted as Belgium's showcase for all that concerns European living, housing, working, and environment.²⁴ It aims to demonstrate how we will be living and working in the future.²⁵

The Living Tomorrow 2 complex, opened in 2000 and due to run until 2005, is an expansion of the original Living Tomorrow concept, which ran on the same site between 1995–2000. It was founded by two Belgian businessmen and is supported by the Belgian national authorities, the regional government (the Flemish community), and local authorities.²⁶ Around 90 companies contributed to Living Tomorrow 2, mainly through the provision of technology.²⁷

The complex consists of four areas: a house of the future with a home office, an office of the future, functional areas (reception hall, accommodation, auditorium and restaurant), and gardens.^{25, 27} It seeks to raise public awareness of the latest technologies for making people's lives more comfortable and worthwhile.²⁴ The complex is open to groups (including schools), individuals and for business functions.

How is Philip Morris involved in Living Tomorrow 2?

Philip Morris (Altria), the parent company of Kraft Foods, Philip Morris International, Philip Morris USA and Philip Morris Capital Corporation, is one of four "co-initiators" of Living Tomorrow 2. According to the co-initiator contract, Philip Morris will pay approximately €1 000 000 over the five year life of the project and can in return advise on its design and running.²⁸ Philip Morris is also mentioned in the presentation at the beginning of each visit and in Living Tomorrow 2 promotional material, including brochures, television commercials, newspaper advertisements, posters, on the display-panels inside the complex and on the official website.²⁸

Why is Philip Morris involved in Living Tomorrow 2?

Living Tomorrow is promoted to companies as a means of showcasing their technologies and a "unique marketing instrument, that can consolidate the profile of the participant (be it as innovator, market leader, quality pursuer, visionary)".²⁹ For Philip Morris, it offered the dual benefit of directly promoting its food products and indirectly promoting smoking by showcasing ventilation technology as a means of accommodating smokers and non-smokers in the office, restaurant, and bar environment.³⁰ The potential synergy between these businesses is highlighted in two of Philip Morris' objectives for Living Tomorrow 2, to:

1. "Promote application of designs, products, services and operating practices that provide for an indoor environment that can accommodate diverse expectations of occupants and their activities, including smoking.
2. Promote the development of innovative systems for grocery product marketing, retail distribution, inventory control, menu planning and the (exclusive) use of Kraft

Jacobs Suchard products in relevant displays and settings in the facility."³¹

To achieve its first objective, the focus of this article, Philip Morris assisted the Living Tomorrow 2 organisers with the air treatment and ventilation aspects of the complex.³² They employed an engineering consultancy firm to identify suppliers who could provide the technological expertise to support Philip Morris' overall ventilation and environmental position.³³ Interested companies were invited to the Living Tomorrow 2 complex for a guided tour and Philip Morris encouraged them to collaborate by promising worldwide publicity for their products and offering to consider them for other demonstration projects around the world.³⁴ Healthy Buildings International (HBI), an indoor air quality consultancy firm, was also involved in discussions about how Philip Morris could use the available HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) applications in the complex to maximum advantage.^{12, 35} While claiming to be an independent air quality consultancy company, HBI have strong links with Philip Morris and a history of conducting ventilation studies for them, with the specific aim of promoting the tobacco company's indoor air quality position.^{36, 37}

Philip Morris took particular interest in the design of the bar and restaurant areas. The bar, which allows smoking, was fitted with a bar counter extractor hood and several "smoker stations".^{38–40} It was designed to be highly visible, being located in the Reception/Event Hall of the complex. It is used as a working exhibition and also as a typical bar for events and functions.⁴¹ Its importance is revealed in the following statement from Philip Morris:

"The reception area should be treated as if its main function is a bar. It needs to be a show case of best practice because bars are key areas for the Philip Morris Courtesy of Choice programme."⁴²

Although the engineering firm had assumed the restaurant area would be smoke-free, Philip Morris instructed that it must be capable of dealing with smokers. The firm therefore had to modify their design to allow for smoking.⁴² As in the bar, ventilation was fitted to demonstrate how smokers and non-smokers could be accommodated.

Philip Morris' section of the Living Tomorrow 2 website is used to highlight further the role of ventilation in dealing with indoor air pollution and to promote its Courtesy of Choice and Traditional Hospitality programmes.⁴³ These international programmes seek to prevent smoke-free legislation by promoting accommodation in the hospitality industry.¹² Although Philip Morris promotes these ventilation based solutions, the site has disclaimers that the ventilation measures suggested for each programme:

"(are not) intended to address the health effects that have been attributed to tobacco smoke in the air".⁴³

This is consistent with current research detailed earlier, which states that ventilation does not effectively deal with the health effects of SHS.^{15–17} Interestingly, Philip Morris' own profile on the web site does not indicate that it is a manufacturer of cigarettes, nor is there any mention of cigarettes in a Living Tomorrow Press Kit, which describes Philip Morris simply as, "a respectable manufacturer of quality consumer goods".⁴³ This is in line with Philip Morris' recent corporate image overhaul, which seeks to promote the company more as a socially responsible producer of consumer goods than a tobacco company.⁴⁴

Philip Morris envisaged the wider value of involvement with Living Tomorrow 2. It proposed to hold a worldwide congress there every two years with “all the most important businessmen of the world”.³⁵

Legislative concerns

Philip Morris discussed internally whether its involvement in Living Tomorrow 2 would contravene the (then draft) 1998 European Union (EU) tobacco advertising and sponsorship directive.^{45, 46} The conclusion was that:

“...genuine corporate sponsorships are likely to pass muster under almost any ad ban that would go into effect in Europe. What qualifies as a genuine corporate sponsorship is of course difficult to define – both the Belgian and the EU ad ban are extremely vague on what sorts of communications can constitute indirect advertising in violation of the ban...(the) feeling is (that)...indirect advertising provisions are aimed at ploys to circumvent the prohibition on brand advertising, not at corporate sponsorships per se.”⁴⁶

This highlights the ease with which advertising and sponsorship restrictions can be undermined. Although this directive was later annulled and replaced with the 2003 directive which, inter alia, restricts cross border sponsorship and internet advertising, Philip Morris’ sponsorship of Living Tomorrow 2 appears to fall outside current regulation.

DISCUSSION

Limitations of the research

The limitations to research using internal tobacco documents have been discussed in detail in other papers.²² One notable limitation is that there are gaps in detail, where documents referred to in other documents we obtained could not be found on the tobacco document websites. This includes where attachments mentioned in emails between parties could not be found. One notable absence is that we could not find any documentation relating to the first approach Philip Morris made to the organisers of Living Tomorrow 2, before becoming co-initiators. It would have been extremely useful to see how Philip Morris had approached the organisers, and how/whether the organisers had to be persuaded to allow smoking in the complex. It may be that the documents provide only a partial view of the company’s true intentions in contributing to Living Tomorrow 2.

Another notable omission is the absence of any formal evaluation of Living Tomorrow 2 by Philip Morris. Without this, its impact is hard to assess but according to Living Tomorrow’s own figures, each year around 150 000 visitors are given a guided tour of the site.⁴⁷ High profile visitors to Living Tomorrow include Princess Mathilde of Belgium, Belgian Prime Ministers Guy Verhofstadt and Jean-Luc Dehaene, and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji of China.⁴⁸ Living Tomorrow has also featured on television and in newspapers around the world.²⁵

As the industry hoped, until recently there has been little progress on smoke-free legislation in Europe, either at country or EU level.¹⁸ But what role the Living Tomorrow 2 project has played in influencing mindsets is unknown. The decision to invest in a project in Belgium might be significant: previous Belgian smoking legislation was considered by the tobacco companies as being a sympathetic model that they wanted to encourage other countries to follow. This was based on the notion of accommodation and tolerance—just the approach encouraged in the Living Tomorrow 2 complex.¹⁸

What this paper adds

The tobacco industry has become increasingly concerned about the possibility of restrictions on smoking in public places. The industry has used a variety of means to avoid the need for regulation, including promoting ventilation technology as a means of accommodating smokers and non-smokers in a shared environment. However, ventilation technology is regarded as being inadequate in dealing with the health effects of second hand smoke (SHS).

This paper describes for the first time Philip Morris’ role in the Living Tomorrow 2 demonstration complex, and outlines the rationale behind its involvement. The paper contributes to the growing literature revealing how the tobacco industry has tried to spread disinformation, undermine advertising restrictions, and counter or deter public health policies on SHS. The findings highlight the need for carefully defined and comprehensive restrictions on indirect advertising and sponsorship by tobacco companies and for effective bans on smoking in public places.

Conclusion

Internal tobacco documents such as those used here offer a valuable opportunity to uncover tobacco industry activities aimed at influencing public policy. This case study outlines the lengths tobacco companies are prepared to go to promote the use of ventilation as a means of accommodating smokers and non-smokers in a variety of indoor environments including the workplace, public places, and home. It illustrates how corporate sponsorship of the type seen here can serve a number of purposes: it promotes the company and its diverse products; it communicates inaccurate messages on the effectiveness of ventilation and the social acceptability of smoking; it discourages smoke-free legislation; and it undermines advertising restrictions. The potential synergies between diversified businesses and the ease with which all but the most specific advertising and sponsorship bans can be undermined are highlighted.

The opportunities that a much visited tourist attraction provide to promote the ventilation approach to key decision makers and the general public is obvious. Indeed, despite evidence that ventilation is ineffective in clearing SHS to safe levels, a visitor to the Living Tomorrow 2 complex would be forgiven for thinking that ventilation is the ideal solution to SHS, rather than a highly contentious issue. This is perhaps particularly the case as Philip Morris, while admitting its contribution, has not been open about its role as a cigarette manufacturer.

The Living Tomorrow website details plans to open Living Tomorrow complexes in cities across the world. A Living Tomorrow complex has just opened in Amsterdam and there are plans for others in London, Berlin, the USA, and Asia.⁴⁹ Although Philip Morris is not a co-initiator of the Amsterdam complex, the potential still exists for tobacco companies to spread their “accommodation through ventilation” message using demonstration projects such as Living Tomorrow as vehicles.

The organisers of demonstration schemes such as Living Tomorrow, the general public (who visit such sites) and governments (who may provide funding or less formal support) should be made aware of the tobacco industry’s rationale for involvement in these projects and reminded of the impacts of SHS on health and the failure of ventilation to provide an adequate solution.

As the world community strengthens tobacco control policies, it is inevitable that tobacco companies will explore new and more imaginative ways of promoting tobacco

consumption. This includes the use of corporate sponsorship, as demonstrated by the Living Tomorrow 2 case study. Policymakers must be cognisant of the devious tactics the industry employs to promote its own agenda. Tobacco control legislation should be continually modified and strengthened in response to the changing activities of the tobacco industry, as it strives to evade existing legislation and deter the advent of new legislation. This will require bans on all forms of sponsorship that could directly or indirectly promote tobacco products or consumption, or spread misinformation on smoking in public places.

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