

News analysis

Australia: campaign gets smoking parents to cut down

A campaign to protect children from environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) has achieved a significant level of behaviour change by smoking parents. The “Car and home: smoke free zone” campaign resulted in a 55.7% increase in the number of reported smoke-free homes occupied by smokers with children aged under 6. There was also a 41.8% increase in the number of reported smoke-free cars.

ETS exposure can cause children problems from asthma, lower respiratory tract infections such as pneumonia and bronchitis, coughing, wheezing, middle ear infections, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). It has also been linked to an increased risk of bacterial meningitis, learning difficulties, autism, behavioural problems, and heart disease.

The ETS and Children Project was launched in 2002 in New South Wales (NSW) to limit the exposure of children aged 0–6 to ETS in the car and home environment. Campaign activity was funded by a \$A2.4 million (US\$1.8 million) grant from the NSW Department of Health and was run by a taskforce of government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The main message of the campaign was summarised in the slogan “Car and home: smoke free zone” and parents and carers were asked to make their homes and cars smoke-free by going outside if they needed to smoke and by asking visitors to do the same.

Resources were developed to deliver the campaign message in English and a number of local community languages, which were reinforced in three mass media campaigns. Commercials aired all over the state on television and radio, supported by billboards and stories and features in newspapers and magazines. Health professionals and childcare workers were also targeted, to encourage them to include information about the health risks of ETS in their

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The “Car and home: smoke free zone” campaign, launched in New South Wales in 2002, has proved successful in persuading smoking parents to reduce their children’s exposure to secondhand smoke.

discussions with parents who smoke. This helped spread the message among the target audience, as well as increasing the sustainability of the campaign message beyond the project’s lifespan.

Although smoking rates continue to decline in NSW (the daily rate is 17.2% for males and 15.8% for females), rates for Aboriginal and other culturally and linguistically diverse groups remain much higher. It was a priority for the project to reach these groups, in view of their children’s ETS exposure being correspondingly high, too.

A community grants scheme enabled local groups to conduct culturally appropriate projects within their own communities. The funding for each group varied according to the scope and size of their proposal and the type of activity they wished to undertake, and ranged from \$A4850 to \$A30 000 (US\$3600–22 500). Applicants for the grants were required to work with at least one of the organisations represented on the taskforce, which led to the formation of strong networks.

Some grants translated existing resources into community languages with the result that information is now available in Arabic, Assyrian, Bosnian, Croatian, Farsi, Greek, Khmer, Italian, Mandarin, Samoan, Serbian, Spanish, Tongan, and Vietnamese. Some grant recipients adapted resources to ensure that they were both linguistically and culturally appropriate for their community. For example, the issue of hospitality was seen as a potential barrier to making the home smoke-free for some Arabic speaking people, as they did not want to offend visitors by asking them to smoke outside. The slogan developed

by this language group focused on this issue “Your visit benefits us, but your smoke harms us”. Another grant targeting Pacific Islander groups found that the campaign slogan conveyed a different meaning to the one intended. For some of the Samoan language groups “Car and home: smoke free zone” was taken literally, meaning, “This is an area where you are free to smoke”. The resource developed for this community used the slogan “Smoking makes kids sick. Smoke outside your home and car”. Culturally specific resources were also developed for use by Aboriginal communities, including professional development material for Aboriginal health workers.

The campaign has been rigorously evaluated. By the end of the campaign period 73% of homes with a smoker and children aged 0–6 years reported being totally smoke-free with a further 18% reporting they did not smoke when their children were in the same room. This is considered a great result and a good example of what can be achieved when government and NGOs work together. It is also encouraging to see those parents and carers who are unable to quit, change their smoking behaviour to protect the health of their children.

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Lebanon: water pipe line to youth

Most Arab countries, like many other low to middle income nations, are still in the relatively early stages of the



In Lebanon, youth and women are the target of a marketing campaign featuring a new tobacco product for use with the more traditional water pipe.

cigarette tobacco epidemic. Lebanon has the dubious position among Arab countries of being the only one with relatively equal rates of cigarette smoking among men and women. The water pipe is a traditional form of tobacco smoked in Arab countries, including Lebanon. Recently, trends have shifted between tobacco types, and water pipe smoking is becoming the preference for young people and women specifically, ousting the once more popular cigarette. As an indicator of its popularity, thriving new delivery services have appeared, linked to mobile phones. By using their phones in accordance with prescribed directions, customers can even specify the number and flavour of pipes they want. According to how many times they call the sales line, the appropriate water pipe(s) will be delivered to their home for the equivalent of just US\$1 dollar apiece.

Taking advantage of this visible trend, the state subsidised tobacco company recently launched a new tobacco product for use with the water pipe. It is clearly aimed at the youth market—its name, “Shabablek”, literally translates as “Youthful”. Its advertisements depict young men and women enjoying evenings out on the town. Ironically, with an eye on an ever “health conscious consumer”, the new product comes in individually wrapped portions (hitherto in large bales) and the promise that it has not been touched by human hands. The new product got an unmistakable boost by being launched under the aegis of the minister of finance, indicating a continuing focus on short term financial gain, rather than long term health planning.

Wedge at the end of the Mediterranean, Lebanon strives to find its way between differing cultures and continents. The images promoted by

multinationals and more recently the state sponsored tobacco companies are of hip, trendy, and successful young persons enjoying the ideals more commonly attributed to the west. Most recently, a picture of a bikini clad young woman lying beside a swimming pool in Beirut and smoking a water pipe was widely circulated. To traditionalists, such pictures will undoubtedly portray an image of Lebanon not welcomed by the eastern world. But to others, it will seem an affirmation of the country’s future prosperity. To those who want to profit from western minded young consumers, such images must seem like helpful free marketing. Whatever their cultural significance, the lifestyle they illustrate has serious implications for the health of future generations of Lebanese people.

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USA: TIME’s lingering double standard

The cover of TIME magazine on 17 October 2005 invited readers to learn about “living better longer”. There was no tobacco advertisement on the back cover that week, but the following week it was business as usual with a Camel ad depicting a young female model. US health advocates say this illustrates a recent trend: when a publication carries a major health article heralded on the cover, the rest of the magazine tends not to contain tobacco advertising, but it resumes in the next issue. In the past, it was not unusual to find a striking announcement of a health article on the front cover, and a full page cigarette advertisement on the back of the same issue (see the TIME covers shown in

Tobacco Control 2003;12:338). Some think the latest trend marks a minor step forward, while others reckon it is merely a refinement of double standards. The real motivation is probably commercial: tobacco companies know that, as in politics, a week is a long time for the truth about smoking to linger, allowing the glamorous fable to be resumed untainted.

India: still at the bravery game

In our last issue, we reported the good news that Godfrey Philips, Indian subsidiary of Philip Morris, had decided to abandon the bravery awards scheme it had used so successfully for many years to promote its Red & White cigarette brand (see *Tobacco Control* 2005;14:297). However, it has already become apparent



TIME still carries advertising for tobacco products, although now not usually in the same issues as those featuring articles focusing on health.



Toilet cubicles covered with EU health warnings in use at the XX World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne. Photos: Rainer Holz/Bär + Knell; www.baer.knell.de.

that the company sees far too much benefit from the scheme to give it up altogether.

In its heyday, the Red & White Bravery Awards let Godfrey Philips to run massive advertising and public relations campaigns around India, soliciting nominations for various categories of personal bravery. Apart from associating the name, colours and logo of Red & White cigarettes with laudable human qualities and roping in opinion leaders to hand over the awards, the presentation ceremonies allowed the company to schmooze up to the good and the great. State government ministers and senior civil servants always found time to attend, even though they may have been seriously behind with such tasks as, say, implementing tobacco control regulations already passed by parliament, but requiring some slight bureaucratic action to become effective.

For the cigarette makers, losing the brand name was only a partial defeat: by changing the name of the scheme to the Godfrey Philips Awards, they could still run the gravy train for the influential people they need to cultivate for the sake of their commercial future. So it was that late one night in October, the Burning Brain Society, the non-governmental organisation whose legal case led to the banning of the brand name for the awards, learned that the scheme was going ahead again, with the name of the company in place of the brand, in their own state, Haryana. It was to take place the very next evening in the prestigious Taj Hotel in the state capital, Chandigarh. Even the awardees themselves, as well as journalists the company hoped would cover

the event, were only informed one day in advance.

The society immediately fired off urgent pleas to everyone from the state governor and first and deputy first ministers of the state government, to the police and the hotel, and even to the president of India. Setting out a formidable list of well argued reasons why the event contravened the provisions of tobacco promotion law, and the interpretations of the court, they urged the recipients to cancel or at least boycott the event. While no immediate response was received from politicians or officials, and the event went ahead as planned, the disappointment of those concerned with health must be set in context.

It may not seem like it now, but the latest saga from Chandigarh almost certainly signals the death throes of a particularly cynical and inappropriate form of tobacco promotion. After all, what had once been an open, public show of glory proclaimed by a wealth of advertising and press coverage before, during and after the awards ceremony, has rapidly shrunk to a covert affair whose very existence was kept secret until the last moment.

This sort of trend has been seen in other countries, such as Australia, where social acceptability as well as laws forced changes once thought impossible. Tobacco companies that once flaunted the glorious garb of corporate munificence, have sunk to quick and furtive grabs at the hem of decision-makers' raiment, in situations reminiscent of the speak-easy. If pressure on politicians is maintained, it may be increasingly difficult to recruit worthwhile guests of honour. And with secrecy paramount, the company's

accountants may be the ones to take the bravest, if inevitable decision.

Germany: health warnings at your convenience

German artists Bär + Knell came up with the idea of using the European Union health warnings to cover nearly 1000 temporary toilets used at the closing event of the XX World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne in August. The toilet cubicles extended in lines totalling more than 1.5 km, and were visited by many of the nearly one million young people who attended the event, many of whom kept a joint vigil with the Pope before spending the night in the open air. The idea went deeper than the shocking images that faced casual visitors to the cubicles. Gerhard Bär of Bär + Knell observed that the toilet has always been a place where communication takes place—one need only think of all the graffiti that graces the walls of public toilets, he said, or the legendary humour scrawled inside. Toilets are the “quiet places” where you have time to think, but they are also the locations where the first cigarettes are secretly smoked behind closed doors, where drugs are sold and consumed—and, sometimes, where people die. At the end of the World Youth Day the toilet tents were due to be cleaned, dismantled, and re-erected in 1000 school playgrounds all over Germany. The project was carried out in collaboration with the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Tobacco Control in Heidelberg.



Macedonia: Seen recently in the small state of Macedonia, the southern part of former Yugoslavia, which gained independence in 1991, were these advertisements for cigarettes made in Slovenia.

UK: Scottish report exposes tobacco tactics

In September, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Scotland launched a report, *The unwelcome guest: how Scotland invited the tobacco industry to smoke outside*. Using previously uncovered tobacco industry documents as well as government, press and internal archives, the report shows how the campaign to go smoke-free in Scotland—the first part of the UK to do it—was won, and how the tobacco industry tried to stop the legislation being passed.

Hospitality groups such as the Scottish Licensed Trade Association

(SLTA) hired the public relations firm Media House and created a new alliance called Against an Outright Ban (AOB) to lobby Scottish politicians not to ban smoking in public places. British tobacco companies, a tobacco industry funded “smokers’ rights” group called FOREST, AOB, and SLTA all used the tactics developed to fight secondhand smoke legislation in the USA in the 1990s. They tried to create “marketable science” to cause public confusion. For example, the SLTA sponsored research on air quality and ventilation, misleadingly suggesting there was no difference in particulate matter averages between a non-smoking pub and a smoky pub with ventilation in use.

They also denied the health impact of secondhand smoke: Imperial Tobacco gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament claiming that secondhand smoke could not be proven to be harmful (as recently as 2003, its chief executive denied that active smoking caused lung cancer—see UK: judge says advocacy links taint witnesses. *Tobacco Control* 2005;14:298–9).

Other familiar tactics included trying to move the debate away from health issues and toward “smoker’s rights”—a concerted campaign by licensed trade journalists and FOREST put the issue of rights for smokers repeatedly onto the public agenda—and the issue of ventilation. Hospitality groups and the tobacco industry consistently claimed that ventilation systems were the solution to eliminating secondhand smoke exposure in public places, even though scientific experts consistently demonstrate that ventilation systems cannot remove the carcinogens present in secondhand smoke. And against all evidence, the groups opposing the legislation repeatedly claimed there was no popular support for smoke-free public places.

The familiar predictions of dire economic consequences were made, too, including the usual prediction of a 30% decline in licensed trade revenues. In stark admission of the harm caused by smoking, still denied by some on the tobacco industry side, the chair of SLTA even claimed that Scotland could not afford to go smoke-free as the additional costs of people living longer had not been researched.

A feature of the tobacco industry’s strategy is to use groups it creates or supports to advocate its case, rather than doing so directly itself. In Scotland, SLTA shared platforms with tobacco industry executives from Imperial Tobacco as well as from the Tobacco Manufacturers’ Association,

the UK tobacco trade organisation, when it refuted the health evidence on secondhand smoke. It was SLTA, AOB, and other tobacco industry initiatives such as FOREST, Courtesy of Choice, and Atmosphere Improves Results, which delivered the tobacco industry’s messages. This approach was used successfully by the tobacco industry in Beverley Hills in California in 1987, but has subsequently failed in New York, Ireland, and now Scotland.

Scotland’s smoking ban will come into effect on 26 March 2006. With more than 1000 non-smokers dying every year in Scotland as a result of exposure to secondhand smoke, it is long overdue. Going smoke-free is the most radical public health decision taken in Scotland since devolution of power for many areas of government policy to Scotland, a process started in 1997, and resulting in the Scottish parliament that began work in 1999. It has made Scotland the UK’s leader in tackling secondhand smoke.

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Bhutan: a bellyful for the police

For places to conceal contraband cigarettes, the coffin found to contain 3000 packs in Poland seemed imaginative, if somewhat macabre (*Tobacco Control* 2004;13:10). But in Bhutan, where the sale of tobacco, as well as its public use, was banned in December 2004, a booming market of smuggled cigarettes seems to have led to even more bizarre hiding places for illegal supplies.

Hard pressed customs officials in Bhutan say smuggling is especially difficult to control in their country, not just because it is mountainous and sparsely populated, but also because people from all walks of life are involved. Many ordinary people are lured into taking the risk by irresistible rates of profit, not only from importing, but also from moving cigarettes internally: a recent report cited a sixfold mark-up on cigarettes smuggled from the capital to a region only one day’s drive away. But matching the wide range of smugglers is the variety of their concealment; illegal tobacco supplies have been found in everything from vegetable deliveries and general pick-up trucks to army lorries, officials allege. To date, the most ingenious, if tasteless Bhutanese rival to the Polish undertaker smuggler must be the man whose load was found hidden in a pig’s carcass.



Thailand: first to put cigarettes "out of sight" Thailand, which on any assessment has one of the world's most advanced tobacco control programmes, now requires all tobacco displays to be kept out of sight. *Tobacco Control* thinks this is the first nation to have required this, although the Canadian state of Saskatchewan was the first jurisdiction to mandate the "under the counter" rule. A recent visit to Bangkok showed good compliance. The photograph on the left shows a bare display window viewed from the street, with a sign informing smokers that tobacco is sold inside. A few doors down from where this shot was taken, a 7-Eleven store's in-shop display shows the chain's as yet unaltered policy of displaying the packs—*Simon Chapman, Editor*

The Lighter Side



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