Visions of the future
3rd Australian Tobacco Control Conference

The 3rd Australian Tobacco Control Conference was held at Sydney’s Darling Harbour in November. As the theme suggested, many of the presentations focussed on emerging issues such as the tobacco industry’s public image ‘re-birthing’ attempts, so-called ‘reduced harm’ tobacco products (see related article in this issue) and possible future approaches to smoking cessation, extending smoke-free environments, tobacco control advocacy and tobacco product regulation.

Highlights of the conference included presentations by tobacco industry whistle blowers. One of these was Jeffrey Wigand who was portrayed by Australian actor Russell Crowe in the movie The Insider. Wigand, who worked as a scientist for the Brown and Williamson (B&W) Tobacco Company between 1988 and 1993, recounted the events that led him to reveal all on the US 60 Minutes TV program. His work at B&W led Wigand to conclude that nicotine was highly addictive and tobacco use extremely dangerous, which B&W had denied for decades. According to Wigand the company ‘buried’ his reports stating that they would “put the company in harms way”. Wigand’s revelations led to a multi-billion dollar legal settlement between the tobacco industry and 46 US Attorneys General.

Also presenting at the conference was Australia’s “Insider”, lawyer Fred Gulson, once employed as senior in-house legal counsel to WD & HO Wills (now British American Tobacco Australasia). Gulson became a whistle blower (“truth teller” is his preferred term) because he knew that BATA had destroyed thousands of legally sensitive documents under a euphemistically named “Document Retention Policy”. He has now testified in current legal action against the tobacco industry in the US under the Racketeering Influenced Corrupt Organisations statute.

Both men recounted being subject to a litany of threats and intimidation after blowing the whistle.

There were many more interesting topics discussed at the conference, too many to include in this article. If you would like more information about the conference, contact the Editor of this newsletter (contact details on back page).

Season’s Greetings

The Tobacco Unit staff at The Cancer Council would like to wish all TAG members a healthy and truly smoke-free 2006.
'Harm reduced’ cigarettes?

During a recent visit to Australia a Philip Morris US executive, David Davies, announced that the company had developed a “reduced harm cigarette” i.e. a cigarette that produces lower emissions of some toxins. While a truly low toxic emission cigarette may have a theoretical potential to reduce tobacco’s burden of disease, there are good reasons to be cautious about such claims. For example:

- The tobacco industry has misled the public before in relation to supposed low-delivery products i.e. in relation to so-called ‘light’ and ‘mild’ cigarettes.
- The long-term health effects of the new products are unknown and unpredictable.
- There are no regulations in Australia requiring review or evaluation of tobacco products before and after they enter the marketplace.
- These products may encourage smoking uptake among never smokers, reduce quitting attempts by existing smokers and prompt relapse among former smokers thus resulting in an overall increase in tobacco-related death and disease.
- The safer alternative harm reduction approach of nicotine replacement therapy provides nicotine without the toxic and cancer-causing chemicals that are in tobacco smoke.

At the very least, tobacco products claimed to be less harmful than standard products should be subject to independent and rigorous scientific evaluation before they are allowed onto the market.

If you would like more information about the scientific evidence for tobacco harm reduction approaches contact the Editor.

Regulating tobacco

Pro-tobacco interests often claim that the industry is over-regulated. However, as a recent international tobacco control group has pointed out, the industry’s number 1 product, the cigarette, is virtually unregulated. This is despite the fact that cigarette smoke contains more than 4,000 chemical compounds including 69 carcinogens (cancer causing substances).

The Framework Convention Alliance organisation has produced a fact sheet on tobacco product regulation and argues that this lack of regulation has allowed the industry to perfect cigarette design to maximise sales. Some of the design “innovations” include:

- Using additives such as ammonia to maximise nicotine ‘hit’;
- The addition of flavourings such as honey, cocoa and fruit flavours to mask the harshness of tobacco smoke – this, of course, makes smoking easier and more attractive for beginner smokers (i.e. kids);
- The addition of chemicals to ensure cigarettes burn faster and do not self-extinguish (with the aim of increasing cigarette sales) – an unfortunate by-product of this is the increased risk of fire from dropped and or forgotten cigarettes;
- The addition of small holes around cigarette filters which reduced measured nicotine and tar levels during testing by machines in the laboratory, but not when smoked by smokers. This testing formed the basis to misleading and deceptive claims about the health benefits of so-called ‘light’ or ‘mild’ cigarettes.

The Cancer Council believes that governments should strongly regulate tobacco products and more strongly regulate the industry. Such regulation might involve the establishment of an independent regulatory agency that would:

- undertake any necessary communication about tobacco products – this would prevent unsubstantiated product claims by the industry as exemplified by the industry’s deceptive marketing of so-called ‘light and ‘mild’ cigarettes
- require full disclosure about product content and emissions (i.e. the chemical by-products produced when the product is burnt)
- prohibit and/or require removal of additives that make smoking more palatable and less harsh, especially for the young
- require that any harm-minimising technical advances be applied to all combustible tobacco products.

Read the FCA Fact Sheet at http://www.ensp.org/files/04_Tobacco_Product_Regulation.pdf . Alternatively contact the Editor of this newsletter for a hard copy.
Imperial Tobacco – the worst of the worst?

In the July-August edition of TAGlines we reported on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) finding that Australian tobacco companies had misled consumers by marketing “light” and “mild” cigarettes as safer than “full-flavour” brands. In a bout of extraordinary timidity the ACCC decided not to prosecute but to require the companies to pay for an $9 million public education campaign run by the ACCC to inform smokers there is no reduction in risk to health from the use of the light/mild cigarettes.

One company, Imperial Tobacco, initially resisted the ACCC’s “remedy”, refusing to commit a cent to the education campaign. The ACCC now reports that it has obtained court-enforceable undertakings from Imperial to remove its light and mild descriptors. The company will also contribute – wait for it – $1 million to the campaign; this from a trans-national company with a 2005 profit of (the equivalent of) over $AUD3 billion.

Imperial’s obstinacy with regard to this matter is but one example of the contradiction between its fantasyland claims of Corporate Social Responsibility and its real world behaviour. Some other recent examples of Imperial’s corporate irresponsibility include:

- Conducting fantastically themed sales promotions at youth-oriented Australian music festivals

South Australian bar worker wins passive smoking case

A 29 year old bar and gaming room attendant has won a three-year legal battle for workers compensation. The worker, Phil Edge, contracted cancer of the tongue that the SA Workers’ Compensation Tribunal found was related to his work in the smoke-filled environments of the Adelaide pub Mick O’Shea’s. The case was won against WorkCover South Australia which had denied his claim in its role as the workplace insurer.

The message should be loud and clear to operators of pubs and clubs that if you continue to allow staff and patrons to be exposed to second hand smoke (SHS) you run the risk of being sued. The Cancer Council is aware of more than 38 cases worldwide (23 in Australia) in which people have received monetary compensation for illness resulting from exposure to SHS in workplaces or public places. See a list of some of these legal cases on The Cancer Council web site at http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/editorial.asp?pageid=1390 . As many cases do not get reported, these cases likely represent the tip of the iceberg.
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• Advertising its Rizla brand cigarette papers in a way that the British Advertising Standards Authority concluded contained coded references to smoking cannabis. See the clearly youth-appealing Rizla web site at http://www.rizla.co.uk/

• Strongly denying the causal link between smoking and lung cancer for legal defence purposes, whilst acknowledging on its own web site (for public relations purposes?) that smokers are far more likely (actually up to 20 times more likely) to contract the disease.

• Vigorously resisting the implementation of proven best practice tobacco regulation.

See these recent major reports on tobacco industry Corporate Social Responsibility:


• http://www.ash.org.uk/ (and click on Tobacco industry, Conduct, Corporate Social Responsibility and scroll down to Behind the mask. The real face of corporate social responsibility).

Puffs of Smoke

James Bond quits
The new 007 will reportedly be a non-smoker in the next James Bond movie, Casino Royale. While Ian Fleming’s original Bond was a virtual chain smoker, the director of the next film, Martin Campbell, is reported to have commented that “(for Bond to smoke in the film was) not quite the right thing”. The new Bond will be played by British actor Daniel Craig (Sylvia; Lara Croft Tomb Raider; Elizabeth).

Is Thailand the tobacco industry’s biggest nightmare?
The Thai Government didn’t blink in the face of tobacco industry opposition to a recent decision to ban point-of-sale tobacco advertising and promotion. Among the industry tactics were intense lobbying and when that didn’t work, threats of legal action. The ban was introduced on 24 September 2005.

Killer quotes from the tobacco industry

Nicotine and addiction – The changing tune of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company?

1972 – In private, rejoicing about the addictiveness of nicotine!

“In a sense, the tobacco industry may be thought of as being a specialized, highly ritualised and stylised segment of the pharmaceutical industry. Tobacco products, uniquely, contain and deliver nicotine, a potent drug with a variety of physiological effects.” RJR confidential memorandum, 1972.

1994 – In public, denial is the order of the day

“Mr. Congressman, cigarettes and nicotine clearly do not meet the classic definition of addiction.”


2005 – Beating around the bush after their lies were exposed

“Smoking is addictive as that term is commonly used today. Many smokers find it difficult to quit and some find it extremely difficult. However, we disagree with characterizing smoking as being addictive in the same sense as heroin, cocaine or similar illegal substances.”


Do you know anyone who would like to join our Tobacco Action Group for young members?

We are currently running a competition to win movie passes.

For further details contact
dobsquad@nswcc.org.au

TAGlines is a newsletter for the NSW Tobacco Action Group (TAG). TAG is made up of concerned members of the community who support The Cancer Council’s efforts to reduce tobacco’s burden of death and disease. The newsletter is published bi-monthly and edited by Greg Soulos, Tobacco Control Project Officer, Health Strategies Division. tag@nswcc.org.au
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We welcome your feedback. New members also welcome; just contact the Editor.