



**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.