

# NEWS ANALYSIS

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## Corky, the satellite, and Fishbone Fred

Philip Morris (PM) has been causing serious outbreaks of nausea in the United States, Australia, and other countries for many months now, by its new youth programmes about tobacco (see "The pied pipers of puffing" on pages 14-16 of the Spring issue of *Tobacco Control*). It clearly hopes that projects as inappropriate, most would surely say, as "The Mafia Drugwatch Alert", or "The Adolf Hitler Foundation for Racial Tolerance", will be embraced by greedy, lazy, or stupid, naive politicians. PM's presumed aim is to restore a reputation so unfortunately tarnished by the relentless revelations that the big tobacco companies have system-

atically lied, bribed, obstructed, and otherwise deceived the world in almost as many ways as the millions of their internal documents which serve as proof.

But now PM has a competitor: Brown and Williamson (B&W), American subsidiary of British American Tobacco (BAT), has come up with a real corker. With breathtaking temerity, B&W tried to jump on the publicity bandwagon of the first international policy conference on children and tobacco, which was held in March in Washington, DC, and is reported below. During the conference, B&W issued a circular to the media announcing that its expert on children's smoking would be available, via satellite link, "to talk about peer pressure and parental involvement". To book a "television interview window", journalists only had to lift the telephone to Shandwick, the public relations company acting for B&W, and they and the satellite would do the rest.

And who was this authority on the work of "child psychologists and other experts" who had "determined the top reasons young people smoke"? Step forward B&W's vice president

for corporate and youth responsibility, Mrs Corky Newton. Not renowned for her contributions to the literature of psychosocial research in this area, Corky also apparently knew little about, or was slow to bring to mind, much of the evidence in her field. In either case, it seemed a rather poor show for someone who, based on the researchers' findings, has been busy "developing programmes in partnership with organisations throughout the country to reduce youth tobacco use, thus demonstrating how one US company is attacking the issue of youth smoking".

Corky did at least two interviews, and was described by observers as a middle-aged, grandmotherly type, credible but with little media presence. But perhaps that's exactly the sort of person B&W wants to help restore its public image? After all, when a "vice president" stumbles, when asked to name the cigarette brands made by her paymasters, this would presumably only endear her to cynics who might otherwise suspect that underneath the trustworthy, homespun exterior was just another tobacco executive? Her omission to mention any of her company's own proud research record, however, did seem to be taking the image a bit far.

Fortunately, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (TFK), Washington based and funded by the Robert Wood Johnston Foundation (who also give generous support to *Tobacco Control*) were able to offer guidance to journalists interested in a fuller briefing. Using the same press lists targeted by B&W, TFK sent out a good few pages of key research findings by BAT companies over the past few decades, which Corky should surely have known about. They pointed out how internal documents of B&W and its parent company BAT, show that B&W and other BAT affiliates have carried out or commissioned extensive research into why children start smoking, and when they are likely to start; and that they have taken a keen interest in why young people might start smoking the companies' brands. Many of the fascinating conclusions of this research are now



Corky Newton, vice president for corporate and youth responsibility for Brown and Williamson, answering questions on "peer pressure and parental involvement" at the time of the international policy conference on children and tobacco.

fairly well known around the world, but for the benefit of those who have not yet seen them, we reproduce some here which may be helpful to colleagues, who, like Corky Newton, strive to understand the subject of youth smoking.

- “More important reasons for this attraction are the ‘forbidden fruits’ aspect of cigarettes. The adolescent seeks to display his new urge for independence with a symbol, and cigarettes are such a symbol since they are associated with adulthood and at the same time adults seek to deny them to the young.” (Careful, Corky, or you could become one of those adults, doing the very thing B&W says it’s so keen to avoid.)
- “Starters no longer disbelieve the dangers of smoking, but they almost universally assume these risks will not apply to themselves because they will not become addicted. Once addiction does take place, it becomes necessary for the smoker to make peace with the accepted hazards. This is done by a wide range of rationalization.” (How shocking that one must be to Corky, especially the bit about addiction, as must be another, more sinister finding: “The desire to quit, and actually carrying it out, are two quite different things, as the would-be quitter soon learns.”)
- “Nicotine is the addictive agent in cigarettes.” (These words, by a B&W official in 1983, must be somewhat confusing to Corky, especially when her ultimate boss, BAT’s chief executive Martin Broughton said in 1996: “We have not concealed, we do not conceal, and we will never conceal . . . we have no internal research which proves that smoking is addictive.”) But worse is to come: a B&W project report in 1972 said: “At the last meeting, we were asked to come up with ideas for a ‘youth’ cigarette . . . product or packaging.”
- But Corky can rest assured that a couple of years later the company seemed to accept the need to do research on children. “The younger smoker is of pre-eminent importance: significance in numbers, ‘lead in’ to prime market, starts brand preference patterning . . . but frustrating to reach: values and behavior at variance with rest of the population, skeptical, intense peer pressure, public policy difficulties. . . . Study the Market and Customer, maintain a continuing dialogue with the ‘New’ Smoker . . . behavior patterns—what they do; Attitudes—what they think; Directions—where they’re

headed. . . . Explore and Implement; Create a ‘Living Laboratory’.”

- A year later, a B&W marketing and research firm recommended that the company “present the cigarette as one of a few initiations into the adult world” and “as part of the illicit pleasure category of products and activities”. (Corky, are you really sure you know what you’ve got into?)
- A further two years on, a B&W outline (complete with handwritten notes saying “Big legal problem” and “Pull this page”) stated that “Since Kool is heavily oriented toward the young and the brand’s starter index is 10, it will benefit us long-term to develop promotion events that involve the young and especially to convince the starter group to smoke Kool.”
- In the 1970s, some B&W consultants even recommended cigarettes flavoured with cola (that might be named “Cola-Cola”), or with other sweeteners that might appeal to the youth market, stating that: “It’s a well-known fact that teenagers like sweet products. Honey might be considered.”

In one of her interviews, Corky indicated that B&W had hired an unnamed country music personality to tour elementary schools telling children not to smoke (presumably his style would avoid that bothersome “forbidden fruit” hazard). The television presenter named him as none other than Fishbone Fred—yes, that’s *the* Fishbone Fred, nominated for a Grammy entertainment award. He makes records about the joys of fishing, and sings “safety” songs for kids (remember your telephone number; don’t talk to strangers). And yes, he also proclaims a “take care of your heart, be smart, don’t start [smoking]” message, and has toured at least half a dozen states. His website only mentions B&W once, in a story about him playing “before 1,000 kids in Tallahassee [Florida] recently and everybody loved it”.

Corky may think that TFK and *Tobacco Control* are being cynical, and would no doubt argue that B&W has turned over a new leaf, to which her moment of fame was evidence. Unfortunately, however, try as one might, something wretchedly keeps popping up in the mind from just 18 months ago, when a tobacco industry public relations firm advised that “company spokespeople assume greater visibility in order to demonstrate the ‘new day’ approach of the

tobacco companies”. The trouble is, the new day is just like every other day.

## Training the lawmakers

“If only our country’s health minister could have heard that discussion!”—how often have frustrated tobacco control advocates said something like this after a particularly rich session at a conference where all too many of the participants were recognised experts in the field, and none at all were politicians or their advisory officials. Most important, how often have such sentiments been expressed when a conference has yet again agreed that prevention of tobacco use is essentially a political struggle; getting the health ministers and other senior lawmakers to sit down and hear why and how to enact effective tobacco control legislation has seemed fine in theory, but almost as difficult to achieve as the legislation itself.

At last there has been a major conference to try to remedy this. The first international policy conference on children and tobacco took place in the United States in Washington, DC, in March. Funded by, among others, the Robert Wood Johnson foundation (and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, which it sponsors), and the American Cancer Society, the two day conference brought together health ministers, other leading parliamentarians, senior health ministry officials, and other political leaders representing more than two dozen countries who together, as the organising panel pointed out (and largely thanks to the inclusion of China and India, it must be said), represented about three quarters of the world’s population. The sessions were held in the dignified and splendid setting of the Hall of the Americas, the headquarters of the Organisation of American States, and were opened by a dynamic trio of senators (Richard Durbin—Democrat, Illinois; Roy Wyden—Democrat, Oregon; and Susan Collins—Republican, Maine), aided by an equally dynamic and encouraging address from Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, director general of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

To seasoned conference goers in this field, the most palpable difference from other tobacco control meetings was that, with a few carefully chosen exceptions, very few of the world’s leading tobacco control advocates were on the programme, and many were not even in the building. Many of them had been consulted, of course,

and had in some cases spent hours on the telephone talking through the geopolitics of need, achievement, and expertise in tobacco control, and many were present as observers. But first and foremost this was a conference for those who have the power to try to introduce legislation and commit funds, to learn from those who have succeeded.

In the carefully constructed panel discussions and the working group sessions, actual testimonies by those who have faced up to their responsibilities were the most impressive and instructive material to which the newcomers could be exposed. For example, on the question of being sure to carry your traditional supporters with you, could any advocate have been more helpful than South Africa's health minister, Dr Nkosazana Zuma, when she related with a quiet dignity a significant error she had made? When her battle against some of the fiercest and nastiest opposition yet seen from tobacco interests was already well under way, she realised that she had not explained the policy in detail to her country's trade unions. Finding that some of them were actively lobbying against it, she realised the significance of overlooking this influential sector, and had to make the time to sit down with them to explain it, and ask for their support, an effort which was rewarded in due course.

Among the many discussions in the lobbies, where the advocates and other occupants of the observers' seats made up for their enforced silence during the sessions, there was much talk, and a fair amount of evidence, of a growing political and organisational support for applying far greater American resources to international tobacco control. One area already receiving attention, with cooperation from WHO and a wide array of other institutions, is exploring the potential for litigation. The millions of tobacco industry documents released as a result of the Minnesota lawsuit already hold great potential, and the Brown and Williamson (B&W) repository in the United Kingdom is likely to add to this resource, especially as B&W's parent company, BAT, has been more involved for longer in developing countries. One health minister from a developing country which has legislation covering most aspects of tobacco control policy, on leaving a session that included presentations from lawyers active in American litigation, was heard vowing to start a similar process back home.

## **Gutka: a major new tobacco hazard in India**

What does one do with a newly introduced food product that is industrially manufactured and commercially marketed on a large scale, but has been shown conclusively to cause serious life threatening disease? The solution seems obvious—ban such a product. The process however, can be far more difficult than one would envisage.

*Gutka* in India is one example. It is a generic name for a product that contains tobacco, areca nut, and several other substances in powdered or granulated form and is sold in small aluminum foil sachets. The only known use of this product is that it is put in the mouth and then chewed and sucked. Later, it is generally spat out, or sometimes swallowed. As a commercial product, *gutka* was introduced less than three decades back, but today there are thousands of manufacturers ranging from small to very large, with a combined annual turnover in the order of several hundred million American dollars.

In addition to a major life threatening disease—mouth cancer—caused by oral use of any tobacco product, *gutka* causes another serious disease: oral submucous fibrosis. In this disease, fibrous bands develop in the mouth, mucosae loses their elasticity, and the ability to open the mouth reduces progressively. In extreme cases, victims may be only able to open their mouths enough to pass through a drinking straw. This disease does not regress and has no known cure. The most serious aspect of the disease is that it has a very high potential for cancer development: the relative risk is almost 400 times that of a non-user.

Oral cancer, like lung cancer, takes a long time to develop. The effect of *gutka* on the incidence of oral cancer therefore is not yet apparent, especially because the background incidence of oral cancer is already very high in India. However, oral submucous fibrosis among users seems to develop very fast and there have been many reports on the evolving epidemic of oral submucous fibrosis. This has generated considerable concern in the media.

There have been some attempts to curb and regulate *gutka* promotion and use. In one such attempt, public interest litigation to ban the substance was filed in a state high court. The high court's judgment directed the central government to find out whether *gutka* was a dangerous product. The Central

Committee on Food Standards duly conducted hearings and investigations and concluded that it was a dangerous food product. The committee recommended an outright ban.

Understandably, this raised hopes among India's tobacco control community that the government would now take action. But the *gutka* lobby swung into action and after many months, there have only been conflicting signals and statements from government officials, and no substantial progress. For example, one powerful minister declared that the government would not ban the product as that would affect many areca nut farmers. The health minister could only announce that the government would launch an educational campaign against *gutka* use. This is despite the fact that the largest manufacturer is on record saying: "Yes, *gutka* is harmful, and we have no objection to a ban; but the government should ban cigarettes first."

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## **Thailand: competition yields tough health ads**

As part of the WHO-funded "Smoke-free Thailand Advertising Contest" run by the Action on Smoking and Health Foundation of Thailand (ASH), advertising companies were invited to submit entries with prize money of up to 20 000 baht (US\$570) to be won. Over 20 advertising companies entered the contest and produced 163 adverts on the five themes: non-smoking generation (35 entries); women and tobacco (26 entries); passive smoking (33 entries); impotence (58 entries); and the financial costs of smoking (11 entries). Winners were announced at a press conference in April 1999 and presented with their awards at ASH's professionals for health conference held in Bangkok in May. Entries were displayed at the Lad Prao shopping centre in Bangkok as part of the World No Tobacco Day exhibition held there. ASH sent out high quality copies of the ads to newspapers and magazines throughout Thailand, and many have been run. ASH rates the operation a big success, and plans to run it again next year, expanded to include radio and television ads. They remind others who run similar schemes to include the cost of making the "mock ups" into full ads in any funding proposal, and to explain to entrants that they must respect copyright rules.

## The Queen and I, by B&H

One of the more absurd aspects of the international tobacco market is that one cigarette brand can be made by two different tobacco companies. This means that smokers of a particular cigarette brand, when travelling overseas, may buy what they think is their usual brand, only to find that the overseas version, despite outward appearances, is an entirely different product. It may be made by a company that is a competitor of the one that makes their cigarettes back home, and is likely to contain different tobacco leaf, additives, and other ingredients.

This is true of Benson & Hedges, whose predominant brand colour is gold. That the brand had a royal warrant from the head of state of the United Kingdom (and thus the head of the British Commonwealth) must have been seen by the marketing managers for B&H's British makers, Gallaher, as a huge bonus for their advertising in the United Kingdom. Suppliers of any goods or services to the household of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II are entitled to apply for the warrant, but the household can withdraw it if the products are no longer required.

After years of worrying that visiting dignitaries from overseas would be offended if cigarettes were not available at state banquets and the like, household officials recently decided that the time had come to stop the remaining purchases and thus end the warrant.

Thus will end, after a gracious one year of notice, an old tradition that must have significantly enhanced the image of some brands of cigarettes. The warrant must surely have encouraged many a child to believe that smoking (which, ironically, played a major part in the death of the last four British kings) could not be so bad after all, if the Queen bought these things and allowed her royal coat of arms to be used on the pack.

Just how important the royal warrant has been to enhance the unenhanceable can be seen in India, the most populous commonwealth country, where the B&H brand is made and sold by BAT. If you haven't got the warrant, why not invent a clever copy? Little different, really, than close copies of Lacoste leisurewear, or Rolex watches. Our picture shows the Indian B&H pack, complete with lookalike coat of arms, and the British version, destined soon to be a collectors' item, or an exhibit in a public health museum in the United Kingdom.



Top row: the crests on the lid (left) and back of the Benson & Hedges pack made and sold in the United Kingdom by Gallaher are the royal coat of arms, with the caption: "By appointment to Her Majesty the Queen, tobacconists, Benson & Hedges Ltd, London W1". Bottom row: this pack, made by BAT and bought in India, carries on the front and back a different crest, closely resembling the royal coat of arms, with a caption saying: "Established 1873, Old Bond Street, London".

## South Africa: two winnings and a funeral boom

In the worldwide battle to defend public health against the international tobacco industry, health advocates, however great or small their resources, need a "win" every so often, just to keep up morale. In South Africa, one of the smaller agencies has clocked up two, just by eagle eyed surveillance and the tenacity of its founder. Furthermore, the Tobacco Action Committee (TAC) won its victories in what advocates often feel are no-win areas, owing to the dominance of

some of the tobacco industry's most ardent supporters, such as the advertising industry.

First, TAC's founder Ken Sheppard, an American born businessman resident in South Africa for many years, noticed that an advertisement for Rothmans' Peter Stuyvesant brand was breaking the legal regulations specifying the area to be covered by health warnings. The new, small-sized advertisement was shaped so that the more colourful parts of the design, featuring the cigarette pack, were broader than the top of the ad, where the health warning has to be placed. Legal regulations specify that 10% of the total ad must be occupied by the

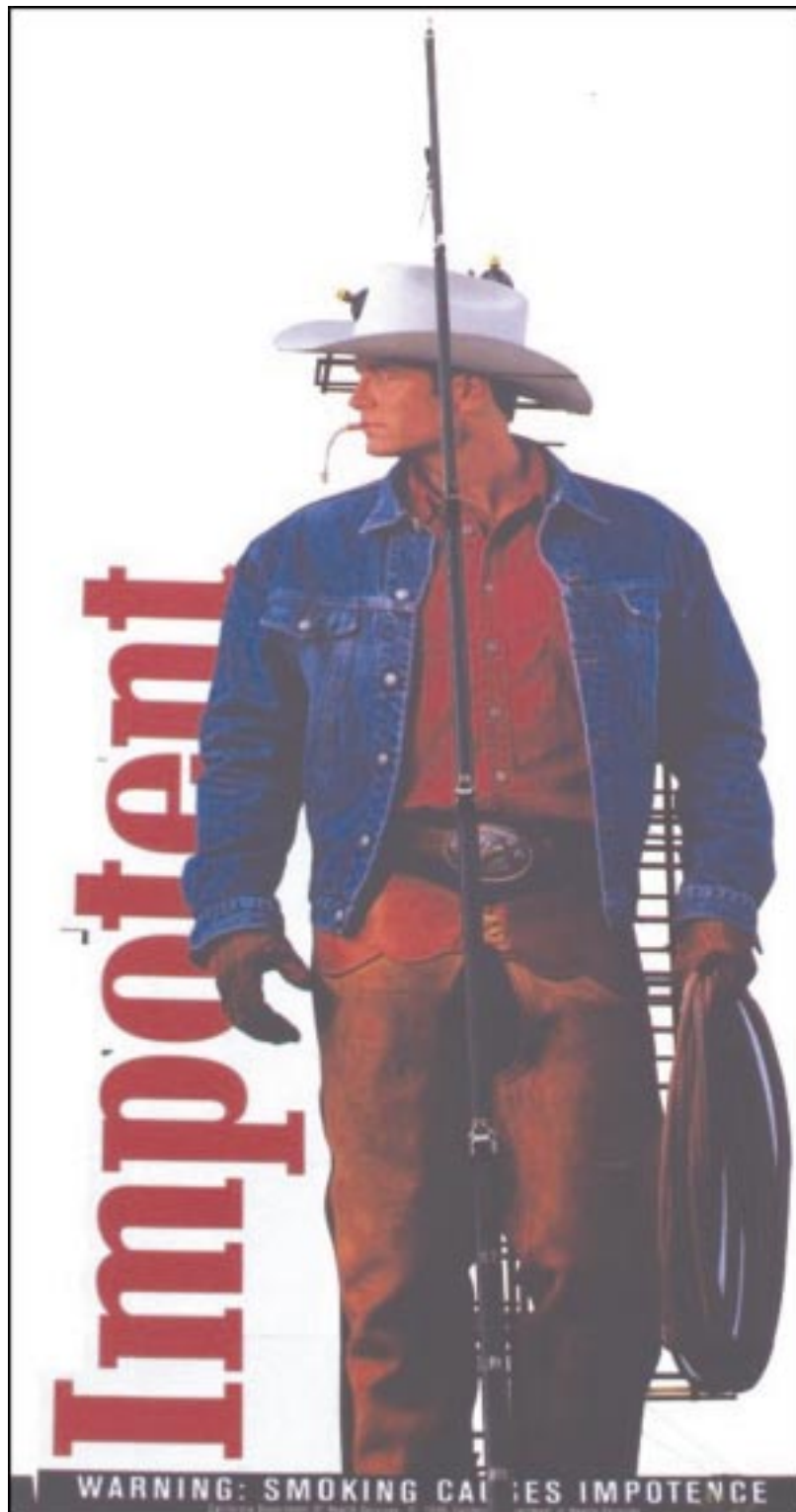
health warning; TAC saw this was not nearly the case in the ad. Equally important, they said, by placing most of the visual content in a wider, more eye-catching lower segment, the ad had been deliberately designed so that the effects of the health warning were minimised. After protesting to the health ministry and threatening to start legal action against Rothmans, TAC received a placatory letter from the ad agency responsible, denying any intention to break the law, but saying the ad had been withdrawn.

Next, TAC spotted an ad for First National Bank, an American business establishing itself in South Africa. The bank's ad included a play on the wording of South Africa's tobacco health warning, a ploy common among advertisers in other countries. But TAC took the view that messing around with the wording of a vital, highly justified, and hard-won warning about the most dangerous consumer product on the market was unacceptable, for fear of softening public perception of its seriousness and thus weakening its effect. Sheppard swung into action again, at first receiving predictable rebuffs from the bank, indicating that it was too late, and alas, the multimillion rand campaign was now unstoppable.

But stopping to think about this was something that *was* possible, and led Sheppard to the realisation that when an ad agency lands such a massive new client, and if the client intervenes to ask for changes in the content of the ad, the agency does not hesitate to comply. And so with further appeals to the bank, TAC persuaded it to think again, and in due course was informed that the offending ads were being pulled. Another small victory, and another demonstration of what a small but energetic campaign can achieve.

Meanwhile, South Africa's new legislation will almost certainly be put to the legal test by the tobacco industry, whose practically limitless resources for litigation mean that to appeal as high up the court hierarchy as possible is now the rule, not the exception. And so lawyers will continue to get richer, faster. And undertakers will not be idle, either: despite an 18% decline in smoking prevalence from 34% to 28% between 1992 and 1997, around 89 000 premature deaths each year in South Africa are predicted on the basis of current consumption.

## USA: Marlboro man limps back to LA



*A 65 foot (19.8 m) high cowboy with a flaccid cigarette, bearing the caption "Smoking causes impotence", is erected by workers (visible behind the Stetson hat) on Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles. Under the terms of the American multistate tobacco settlement, Philip Morris had to hand over the site, which had been occupied by a giant Marlboro cowboy for 16 years, to the California Department of Health Services, which immediately replaced him with his more truthful buddy.*