Secondhand Smoke: Tobacco Industry Attacks

- In 1981, the Tobacco Institute spent more than $100 million in “smoking-health research” campaigns to increase tobacco industry credibility and restore a reasonable doubt that SHS exposure is harmful.¹

- In 1987, Philip Morris admitted, “We will never find an unbiased scientist who concludes that ETS [environmental tobacco smoke] exposure has been proven safe for non-smokers.”²

- A Philip Morris memo, written four days after the EPA announced the release of the final version of its 1992 landmark report finding that SHS is a carcinogen, outlined the tobacco industry’s planned response: “Our overriding objective is to discredit the EPA report…” Tobacco manufacturers filed suit against the EPA in 1993.³,⁴

- Other internal documents made public as a result of a lawsuit against the tobacco industry show how researchers were used to undermine the EPA report. The Tobacco Institute and two law firms managed a project, which paid 13 scientists more than $156,000 to write letters to influential publications criticizing the report. Lawyers edited, and in some instances wrote, the scientists’ letters.⁵

- In March 1998, British American Tobacco Company attempted to discredit a World Health Organization study on the effects of SHS in seven European countries, claiming that the agency suppressed the study because of negative findings. In reality, the paper summarizing the study was undergoing scientific peer review prior to publication, and its findings—consistent with other major scientific reviews—showed a statistically significant increased risk of lung cancer among nonsmoking spouses of smokers.⁶

- In July 1998, in a lawsuit filed by a number of tobacco manufacturers against the EPA, U.S. District Judge William Osteen—a former tobacco industry lobbyist—ruled parts of the EPA report invalid. The EPA filed an appeal in September 1998 and stood by its conclusions on the health effects of SHS, which have been validated by a number of more recent and more comprehensive studies. In December 2002, a three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals threw out the lawsuit against the EPA. The judges ruled that tobacco companies cannot sue the EPA over its secondhand smoke report, because the report was not a final agency action and hence not subject to court review.⁷,⁸,⁹

- After decades of attacking credible science proving SHS’s adverse health effects, Philip Morris’s website now states, “Public health officials have concluded that secondhand smoke from cigarettes causes disease, including lung cancer and heart disease, in non-smoking adults…. [Philip Morris] also believe that the conclusions of public health officials concerning environmental tobacco smoke are sufficient to warrant measurers that regulate smoking in public places.”¹⁰

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REFERENCES

3 [n.a.]. “NCI Supports EPA’s Conclusions that Secondhand Smoke is Dangerous,” News Release, National Cancer Institute, May 4, 1993.