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Letters

Tobacco companies set up smokescreen over lobbying activity

The Guardian, Wednesday 20 January 2010

Reading Chris Proctor's claims that British American Tobacco supports evidence-based public health regulations and "transparent" consultation processes is like peering into an alternate universe (Letters, 16 January). Our paper, which he refers to and is publicly available at PLoS Medicine, shows that BAT reshaped EU policymaking procedures to expressly prevent such regulation and did so by recruiting a series of more credible partners to front its campaign and obscure its involvement (Tobacco corporations lobby to hamper passing of EU health laws, say academics, 12 January). It does not, as Proctor misleadingly claims, outline who should be allowed to voice an opinion to policymakers.

Our study is just the latest contribution to a giant mosaic of evidence that demonstrates the tobacco industry has consistently attempted to manipulate science and policy, which has left the industry's reputation as a credible partner in policymaking in tatters. Proctor's letter should therefore be seen as another attempt by BAT to regain its seat at the policy table to stymie any regulatory intervention that could genuinely reduce tobacco use.

Dr Anna Gilmore, Dr Gary Fooks, Dr Katherine Smith *University of Bath*, **Dr Jeff Collin** *University of Edinburgh*

- It is ironic that, in response to the paper showing how BAT, working behind the scenes, shaped the framework to prevent effective health regulation of secondhand smoke and tobacco advertising, BAT's chief scientist protests that the company supports transparency. BAT, like the rest of the industry, is anything but transparent. Indeed, last year, US courts of appeal upheld a massive verdict that the major cigarette companies, including BAT, created an illegal racketeering "enterprise" to defraud the public. Most important, the courts found that the racketeering activities were continuing and likely to continue in the future.

The PLoS paper shows the corrosive effect that the tobacco companies have not only on health, but also on the very process of governance.

Stanton Glantz

Professor of medicine, University of California San Francisco

• Milton Friedman once wrote: "Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their shareholders as possible." Lung cancer, the world's leading cause of cancer death thanks to tobacco industry marketing, was a rare disease just 80 years ago. Chris Proctor's Orwellian talk of being an active "stakeholder" in future regulation is nothing more than his company's bidding to ensure that any form of regulation which has the slightest chance of further reducing demand will be quietly eviscerated.

Professor Simon Chapman

School of public health, Sydney University

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