

SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES (Be Free – Say NO)

Smoking is a no-brainer, right? Everyone knows it's a bad thing – it's just a matter of education and will power. Not quite. This condensed article examines the dark side of a deadly industry determined to stay alive. So we, the members of WCTU have a work to do and a voice to be heard.

History

Tobacco industries have known for a long time that tobacco is poisonous yet they hid the evidence and continued to promote and advertise and flaunt the sale of cigarettes to the unwary. Since the 1980s there have been people taking tobacco companies to court. Legal action has brought to the public record 400 million pages of tobacco company documents. The evidence reveals a global conspiracy to deny the lethal effects of smoking, its addictiveness and the companies' underhand methods of promoting it. How many million more pages have been buried or gone through the shredder is anyone's guess.

Misgivings about tobacco's effects on health are probably as ancient as use of the weed itself – some early observers believed it dried out your innards. The Dutch made the link to impotence; and the 17th-century Chinese philosopher Fang Yizhi referred to smoking as 'scorching one's lungs'. By the 19th century some medical research was linking cancers of the nose and mouth with snuff and chewing tobacco.

But it was in 1950 that British epidemiologist Richard Doll established the first causative link between smoking and lung cancer. By 1957 British American Tobacco (BAT) had taken to giving cancer the code name 'Zephyr' in an attempt to disguise what it knew. In the US early connections between cancer and smoking saw cigarette sales plunge. The major tobacco companies formed a Research Committee to attack scientific research linking tobacco and cancer and to engage in a pro-cigarette PR campaign.

Current

Big Tobacco has continued to use the same tactics ever since: dismissing scientific proof, challenging health warnings, lobbying furiously against attempts to curb smoking in public places. Some of the lies and denials have been downright brazen. One CEO for example, commented on a study that smoking mothers gave birth to smaller babies by saying: "Some women would prefer having smaller babies."

In some poorer countries of the world, tobacco is the main crop – growing a crop that poisons its growers, the people who handle it and all who consume it. Recently, the traditional head of western **Uganda** said: "My subjects deserve a better livelihood than being producers of poison." Yet about 2 million jobs are provided by the industry which the Tobacco companies dredge up to remind them.

In **India**, to cosy up to the massive electorate of the poor, the government has subsidized the rolled-leaf smokes called *bidis* - even though hand-rolling them is believed to involve six million children under the age of 14. It has also been unsuccessful in curbing the spread of toothpaste with tobacco in it, giving children an early taste.

The Tobacco companies have looked hungrily to **Asia** and poor countries as smoking has declined in the west. Currently the **Chinese** state tobacco monopoly is the world's largest cigarette producer. There are plans to develop special cigarettes for Chinese women, who are traditionally more reticent about smoking. 60% men smoke.

Future

It is estimated that 100 million people died as a result of their tobacco habit during the 20th century. Without effective controls this number could rise to a billion by the end of this century. In 25 years tobacco is expected to be the single largest cause of death.

Consumers worldwide, many of them poor people who can't afford it, spend more than \$400 billion every year to satisfy their tobacco habit. Any reduction in tobacco consumption would free up funds for more useful purchases and necessary medicines.

Let's use our influence to speak up, read up, write up and help save those around us and in poorer countries by speaking truth about the scourge of tobacco and its evils. The Bible tells us that we are called to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves".

*Condensed/adapted by Joy Butler
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