

Tobacco Facts for MPs

October 1999 No 3

Welcome to the third edition of *Tobacco Facts for MPs*. A regular newsletter to highlight the latest in tobacco legislation, research and litigation.

Focus

The latest evidence on: the decline of tobacco control funding in NSW; reasons why smoking is a key public health concern and the lengths the tobacco industry will go to improve their corporate image.



Congratulations to the anti-tobacco campaign called the "Truth" in Florida, USA. According to a recent report issued by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, smoking among Florida teenagers declined greatly in the year since the state launched the aggressive campaign. The study, by the Florida Department of Health, surveyed 20,000 public middle school students in 1998 and 1999 and showed that smoking dropped 19 per cent in the last year. The decline is the largest the nation has seen in almost 20 years. The "Truth" campaign depicts teens poking fun at tobacco companies and accuses them of lying.

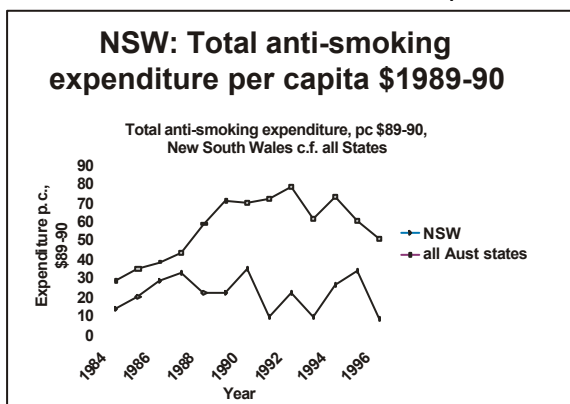
<http://www.state.fl.us/tobacco/>



The National Tobacco Scoreboard developed by the AMA and Australian Council on Smoking and Health rates all state and territory governments according to their performance in a number of tobacco control measures. This year the ACT and WA rated highly with NSW poorly placed at number five. The weakest sections for NSW were: tobacco industry accountability; regulation of nicotine; policies on outdoor public places and low expenditure on tobacco control.

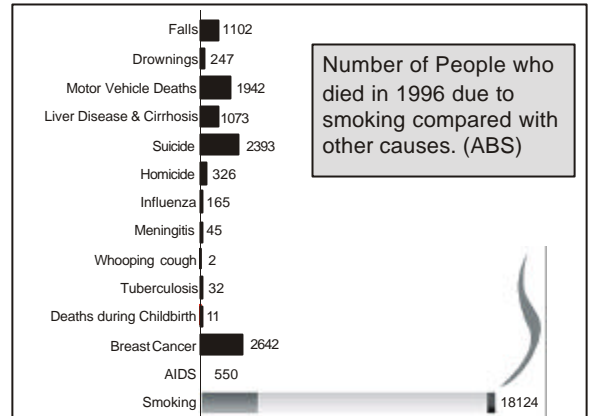
<http://www.acosh.org/releases/scoreboard.html>

NSW Tobacco Control \$low



Why smoking is our No.1 public health concern

The number of Australians who die each year due to smoking is far higher than numbers, who die from external causes such as accidents and, infectious diseases, yet state funding remains low.



(Source: ABS. *Causes of Death 1996*, Cat No.3303.0, October, 1997)

Lung Cancer: NSW biggest cancer killer

New figures released by the NSW Cancer Council show that lung cancer continues to be the leading cause of cancer death in NSW and lung cancer rates are increasing among women. Between the mid-1970s and 1996, lung cancer incidence rates doubled in women and fell by 18 per cent in men. Over the same period, deaths from lung cancer fell by 23 per cent in men and rose by 94 per cent in women. The figures revealed that 2,132 people died from lung cancer in 1996 in NSW (1,467 men and 665 women) which represented 18 per cent of all cancer deaths.

(Source: Coates, MS, Armstrong BK, *Cancer In New South Wales, Incidence and Mortality 1996* Sydney NSW Cancer Council 1999) <http://www.nswcc.org.au/pages/ccic/cct/1996stat/stats.htm>

Public support for funding tobacco control

- Strong public support for:
 - Education to stop kids smoking (96%)
 - Programs to help people quit (92%)
 - Medical research (89%)

Source: Borland, ACCV 1998

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Comment:

Proposed ventilation standard a smoke screen

In 1997, the Carr government passed the Smoking Regulation Act following a report by the passive smoking task force, which recommended smoking be banned in all enclosed public places. This followed increasing evidence that environmental tobacco smoke, a Class 1 carcinogen, was a significant health risk, particularly for employees in hotels, clubs and restaurants.

The Act proposes to implement a ban that is subject to exemptions to businesses that can demonstrate compliance with an air quality standard yet to be established. However, the government has not yet adopted an air quality standard so the ban will not be fully effective until five years after promulgation of the standard.

Indications are that the government plans to incorporate into the Act the proposed new Australian standard for mechanical ventilation for indoor air quality, which is currently under review.

However, such a move would defeat the objective to protect employees and the public from environmental tobacco smoke. The standard fails to meet the employer's duty to protect employees from workplace hazards, and specifically recommends elimination at the source as the best option.

Of further concern is that the new standard will reduce by up to half, the level of ventilation required by the current 1991 standard for hospitality venues, where exposure to environmental tobacco smoke is most severe. The lifetime risk of lung cancer and heart disease to someone exposed at the levels provided in this new standard greatly exceed risks commonly accepted in the workplace for other carcinogens.

Any attempt to use this current standard as the basis for granting exemptions is merely a smoke screen.

Andrew Penman, CEO NSW Cancer Council



Philip Morris sponsors SIDS

The world's largest tobacco company, Philip Morris, has again come under fire, this time for listing itself in a corporate promotional brochure as sponsoring the Red Nose Day foundation, Australia's largest SIDS research charity. Sleeping in the prone position and exposure to tobacco smoke are the two leading known risk factors for SIDS. The glossy brochure, resplendent with photographs of the company's products including cigarettes, identified the charity as among "recipients of support or sponsorship from Philip Morris and its operating companies in Australia". Red Nose Day organisers are believed to have obtained for fundraising purposes, two giant bars of Toblerone chocolate from Philip Morris' Kraft corporate arm, not realising the connection with the tobacco parent company.

On learning that Philip Morris was using the donation as part of its efforts to promote its corporate image, the executive director of the foundation, Ms Kaarene Fitzgerald complained that its name and cause had been misused and announced that the money raised would be returned as unwanted to Philip Morris.

World wide, Philip Morris has aggressively disputed evidence that environmental tobacco smoking is harmful. Anne Jones, Executive Director of Action on Smoking and Health commented that Philip Morris claiming to support SIDS research was about as offensive as Slobodan Milosovic donating to Kosovar refugee relief.

A/Prof Simon Chapman, University of Sydney

Stop Press Philip Morris Double-Talk

This month Philip Morris (PM) announced on their website that:

"There is an overwhelming medical and scientific consensus that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema and other serious diseases . . ."

However Philip Morris's Australian spin-doctor, Ms Nerida White, was quoted in *The Age* saying that:

"The admission did not mean the company accepted that cigarette smoking caused disease". Rather, "it is an acknowledgment that there was a consensus on the issues and acknowledging that consensus goes to our approach of supporting a single consistent public health message".

Her colleague Mr Eric Windholz backed this up by saying:

"It is not about legal liability but communicating more broadly with the public and employees. We wanted to give the public a variety of perspective's on these issues."

The website is part of a cynical million-dollar campaign to improve PM's corporate image in light of the current litigation worldwide.

http://www.philipmorris.com/tobacco_bus/tobacco_issues/health_issues.html

Parliamentary Questions Service

If you would like assistance with a tobacco-related question please contact ASH on 02 93341876

Visit www.ashaust.org.au for copies of newsletters, links to references, tobacco industry documents, fact sheets, media releases, tobacco and health policies and links to international, national and state organisations committed to tobacco control.

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