

Focus:

TOBACCO USERS IN THE DARK

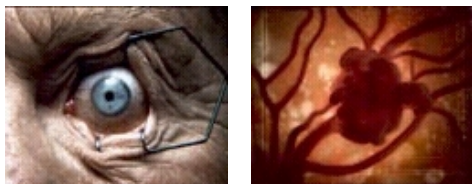
Smoking causes blindness

A hard-hitting advertisement from the National Tobacco Campaign graphically warns consumers that smoking can cause irreversible blindness.

Although there has been neither denial nor admission from tobacco manufacturers, studies reveal that chemicals in cigarette smoke circulate in the blood stream causing damage to the macula – the part of the retina at the back of the eye that is used when looking directly at someone or when reading. Macular degeneration is the result of cumulative damage and is now the leading cause of blindness in Australians over the age of 50.

It is estimated 20,000 Australians have macular degeneration that can be attributed to smoking and 8,000 of these people develop blindness in both eyes because of their addiction.

(Source: <http://www.health.gov.au/mediare/yr2000/mw/mw20085.htm>)



“Eye” images printed with permission.

The National Tobacco Campaign.

A Federal, State and Territory Health Initiative

October 2000

Facts on AMD*

- AMD affects 15% of the population over 50 years of age.
- Smokers run a five-fold risk of developing AMD or cataracts than non-smokers.
- AMD threatens 750,000 Australians with vision loss or blindness.

*AMD (age-related macular degeneration).

Source: *Medical Observer*. May 26 2000. p.3

Demand for hard hitting graphic warnings on tobacco products

Health groups are demanding greater accountability from the tobacco industry, including graphic new warnings on tobacco products, in a push to reduce high smoking rates amongst children and people from low socio-economic backgrounds.

A review of outdated health warnings currently underway by Federal Health Minister Dr Wooldridge provides an opportunity for action now – provide your input today.

Australia should follow the lead set by the Canadian Government and introduce tougher tobacco controls. From January 2001, Canadian tobacco products will include large coloured pictures and frank messages warning users about the health effects of smoking and recommending support services for the nine out of ten smokers who want to quit.

(Refer: *Health Canada* at <http://www.tobacco-control.com>)

Latest News

Asthma sufferer wins \$7600 in law suit

The Melbourne magistrates court in September awarded more than \$7600 in damages to a woman who suffered an asthma attack caused by passive smoking in a restaurant. The woman who had requested a non-smoking table, sued for negligence, breach of contract and deceptive trade practices.

The ruling highlights the legal risk for clubs, hotels and gaming rooms that continue to permit smoking on their premises. Management has a duty of care under OHS laws, common law, disability discrimination etc, to protect the health and safety of both employees and customers.

Chelsea Clinton and sports stars champion smoke-free message

Australia has joined a global program to promote smoke-free sporting role models. The Australian Women's Soccer team, the Matildas, with support from

Chelsea Clinton, launched a new poster to spread a smoke-free message aimed at young people. In NSW the NRL Final Series 2000 was sponsored by the NSW Health Department to show that sport and smoking don't mix.

Smoke-free win for NSW

The *Smoke-Free Environment Act 2000* was successfully implemented before the Olympics with an immediate ban on smoking in most public places, including restaurants and cafes, shopping centres, indoor sports, community and health centres. Eating areas in clubs and hotels have 12 months notice whilst bars are exempt for the time being. Meanwhile, bars and hotels would be foolish to delay smoking bans as they have legal obligations under existing laws to provide safe workplaces for staff, including OHS laws, workers compensation, disability discrimination and common laws. For further info check out www.health.nsw.gov.au or phone 1800 251 528.



Tobacco Facts for MPs

Comment: Good Sports

The Sydney 2000 Olympics showcased to the world smoke-free sports stadiums. There is also a recent trend in state and federal government sponsorship of "smoke-free" sporting teams such as the NRL finals and the Australian Women's soccer team.

It is heartening to see positive and healthy sponsorship of sporting events after many years of tobacco advertising.

Sponsorship of sport and other forms of popular entertainment is seen as an alternative avenue for presenting a positive "no smoking" message to young people. Its potency is boosted if it is part of a comprehensive marketing strategy. Signs at matches help people recall advertising campaigns.

Sports sponsorship and role modelling are known to complement media strategies and school and community tobacco prevention programs. It would be very disappointing if the large amount of funding were used on a one-off sponsorship event without a comprehensive campaign underpinning the sponsorship.

We also know that there are many other cost effective ways of reducing tobacco consumption. The National Tobacco Campaign "every cigarette is doing you damage" has reduced smoking prevalence by 1.8% and mass media advertising needs to be sustained and supported in NSW.

Health groups have worked with NSW Health to produce a comprehensive tobacco action plan for the next five years. We urge the NSW Parliament to give priority to tobacco control by supporting a fully funded Tobacco Action Plan in this session.

Maree Faulkner
Executive Director, Heart Foundation

Times have changed ...



Industry watch

Internal documents from the tobacco industry now available on the internet disclose that in 1977 seven of the world's major tobacco companies conspired to promote "controversy" over smoking and disease, in a secret exercise code named "Operation Berkshire".

This conspiracy to create doubt over the medical evidence and to reassure smokers was coordinated internationally by ICOSI (International Committee On Smoking Issues) in Brussels and implemented through a network of national manufacturers' associations. The aim was to protect the commercial interests of tobacco companies by delaying government action for nearly three decades.

The full story with links to the documents on how the tobacco industry concealed what they knew for so long was uncovered by Australian researchers and published recently in a commemorative issue of the British Medical Journal at <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/321/7257/371>

Good News

Sydney's "Smoke-free" Olympics awarded "gold"



Health groups joined with the World Health Organisation and IOC delegate Prince Albert in congratulating the Premier Bob Carr and Health Minister Craig Knowles over the successful smoke-free policy for all indoor and outdoor Olympic venues. The high standard set by Sydney was greatly assisted by the introduction of smoke-free public places legislation in NSW prior to the commencement of the Olympic Games.

Bad News

Illicit tobacco trade rising



The illicit tobacco trade has grown so rapidly that the Australian Tax Office has appointed a large team of investigators to help stem the loss of millions of dollars in evaded tax. State governments can assist by licensing the 17,000 tobacco retailers in NSW and using the funds to improve education and compliance monitoring. If fishermen are required to have a licence to help improve the regulation of the fishing industry, why not licence tobacco retailers to reduce illegal trade and sales to children?

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

For further information, contact ASH

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