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02/04/99 21:28 BARBARA ROBBINS + WLRK R FAX 9 NO. 010 DRB

UNION STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE 1998 SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT

It is our understanding that the Surgeon General will release a report next week on the issue of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). The report will contain two major conclusions. First, secondary tobacco smoke is an extreme health hazard at any levels; and second, no amount of engineering controls such as improved ventilation can eliminate the hazard. The policy conclusion of the report is simply that all workers must be forced to stop smoking on the job site as a condition of employment.

With regard to the Surgeon General's conclusion on toxicity, we will leave that to the scientists to resolve. However, based on the Surgeon General's relentless pursuit of a political agenda on the smoking issue, much of his credibility must be called into question. In last year's report, instead of contributing new information on the occupational problems confronted by workers from a wide range of workplace toxins, the Surgeon General made a calculated attack on union efforts to force employers to clean up the workplace by elevating smoking to the top of the list of OSHA problems and shifting the burden for safety and health to workers. In this year's report, he has gone one step further by apparently asserting that environmental tobacco smoke is a greater hazard than other toxins such as asbestos.

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This conclusion - that any amount of environmental tobacco smoke is more toxic than a host of substances for which OSHA standards have been set - defies credulity, and we are very anxious to hear what the scientific community has to say about such an assertion.

The second conclusion of the report - that no engineering controls are possible to deal with environmental tobacco smoke - is one which concerns us greatly as trade unionists. We feel that this conclusion violates the fundamental tenet of OSHA efforts that the labor movement has supported for decades; namely, that employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace. It is employers that have the responsibility for cleaning up the workplace by implementing proper engineering controls not by regulating workers except in the most extreme and obvious circumstances.

As in last year's report, the Surgeon General has attempted to shift the burden for cleaning up the workplace to workers.

If environmental tobacco smoke is a hazard, we feel that it can be relieved in nearly all cases by improved ventilation. This will not only clean the workplace of tobacco smoke, but will also serve the more important goal of removing many of the other contaminants of the air quality to create a safe and healthy environment for all workers.

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outright prohibition of a behavior disapproved of by the
Surgeon General seems to be the goal of his conclusions. The
designation of improved engineering controls does a tremendous
disservice to all workers who are concerned about safe and
healthy work environments.

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