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TRUTH SQUAD

Introduction

The tobacco industry is plagued today by a vicious cycle of bad science followed by bad reporting, which is reinforced by more bad science. The cycle has been particularly pronounced on the subject of environmental tobacco smoke.

The main reasons for the current state of affairs are as follows:

- o The industry has had almost no success in discouraging shoddy science, apart from sporadic monitoring of the scientific community, limited involvement with scientific panels and the funding of some research projects, most of which are still in process.
- o Until very recently, the industry has had little success in encouraging a more critical news media examination of anti-smokers' scientific claims.

In the absence of journalistic skepticism, anti-smokers are free to make claims which are unsupported by good research. This situation is worsened by the fact that journalists prefer "black and white" stories -- in the case of ETS, scientific conclusions that are firm and unqualified. To make matters worse, the "positive" antismoking publicity encourages those who fund the research and so they finance more. The cycle continues.

This will not be an easy pattern to break. It is difficult to learn much about on-going research. It is difficult to comment intelligently on a research report we have not seen. It is sometimes several weeks after a report has been released that we see it, giving us a late start on the process of examining it critically. By that time, our response is all too often "yesterday's news" in the eyes of the media.

This document describes a plan to establish a "truth squad" to attempt to break the cycle on ETS.

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TI DN 0002647

Objectives

1. To encourage critical, objective news media reporting of all ETS science.
2. To discourage the support and promotion of unsupported scientific claims related to ETS.

Strategies

1. Respond quickly to unsupported scientific claims.
2. Encourage media skepticism on unsupported ETS science claims through continuing outreach efforts.
3. Confront journalists who have failed to exercise skepticism on unsupported ETS claims.
4. Inform legislators, agency staff, university, foundation and voluntary agency officials of all instances of shoddy research and unsupported conclusions which they have financially or otherwise supported.

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Tactics

1. Identify all antismoker ETS research as early as possible, prepare briefing papers on its probable conclusions and timing, on the research team, and on possible industry responses.
2. When adequate lead time exists, conduct press conferences or briefings to pre-empt antismoker release of unsupported or shoddy findings.
3. Develop list of "10 questions left unanswered by antismoker scientists". (See appendix A.) Also develop background sheet summarizing the history of bad research conducted by key antismoker scientists.
4. In those instances where we have no early warning of antismoker research, aggressively respond with "10 questions" and encourage reporters to call back antismokers for clarification.
5. If well known antismoker scientists are releasing the findings, focus media attention on obvious bias of researchers, past history of shoddy results, and "10 questions."
6. Obtain the study itself as rapidly as possible and develop a written critique. From that critique, encourage qualified scientists to:
 - a) produce letters-to-the editor for every publication which carried the original story.
 - b) write letters to the organization funding the research asking that a more honest disclosure of the facts be made. Where appropriate, send copies of the letter to the news media and the governing board of the relevant institution.
 - c) write letters to members of the relevant appropriations and/or authorization committees, if government-funded research is involved.

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7. Utilize ETS scientists for two types of media relations efforts:
 - a) setting the record straight with members of news organizations carrying uncritical or unskeptical reports of shoddy ETS science.
 - b) one-on-one briefings of a cross-section of members of the media in the top 25 media markets in the U.S., preferably by the end of 1987.
8. Institute a mass-mailing to all major print, radio and television outlets in the U.S. stressing the importance of fair and balanced coverage of ETS science. This mailing will take a tough tone, going so far as to demand even-handed treatment. (See appendix B.)
9. Reinforce mass mailing with personal visits with or without ETS scientists to key journalists (e.g. Boston and Chicago AP and UPI) who have failed repeatedly to contact us for our position.
10. Reinforce mass mailing with an advertising campaign featuring "10 questions" both for scientists and lawmakers sponsoring public smoking legislation. Place ads in Editor and Publisher, Columbia Journalism Review and other media trade publications.
11. Reinforce mass mailing with use of targeted direct mail, including "FYI" reprint vehicle, to show examples of critical reporting or editorializing on ETS issue.
12. Revise workplace video and, if necessary, supplement it with new material for use in briefings by ETS scientists and TI spokespeople. Create a video detailing "10 questions."
13. Provide witnesses to discuss the quality of government-funded research to those committees of Congress considering relevant appropriations and authorizations.

TI DN 0002650

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Staff Resources

This project will be managed by Scott Stapf, director of media relations. Non-media activities (e.g. contact with legislative committees and witness search) will be directed by the issues staff. Stapf will be supported by the spokesperson team, the director of statistics, the public smoking issues manager and the Information Center staff. State Activities and Federal Relations personnel will be asked to participate in contact with public officials.

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APPENDIX A

THE TEN QUESTIONS ANTISMOKERS DON'T WANT YOU TO ASK

1. Isn't it true that the National Research Council (NRC) released a report in November that reviewed the scientific literature and reached the conclusion that there is no evidence that "casual exposure" to tobacco smoke (i.e. in restaurants and the workplace) poses a risk to nonsmokers?
2. Are you aware that no U.S. court in the last 10 years has concluded that cigarette smoke in the air is a proven risk to nonsmokers? Are you aware that a Japanese court held in late March 1987 that the science does not show that environmental tobacco smoke, or ETS, jeopardizes the health of nonsmokers? And that a high Canadian appeals court reached the same conclusion in April 1987?
3. Why is that the three major international conferences which have been convened to review ETS science have concluded that there is no convincing proof that healthy, nonsmokers are at risk?
4. You have referred to the Surgeon General's 1986 report on ETS. Are you aware that he conceded that the support for his arguments is "inferential"? Are you aware that the same report also states that, regarding lung cancer in nonsmokers, the "risk associated with involuntary smoking exposure is uncertain"? Does any of this add up to solid proof?
5. Are you aware that no U.S. study of environmental tobacco smoke has found a statistically significant level of elevated risk to nonsmokers?
6. I am told that 11 of the 13 major studies analyzing ETS and lung cancer in nonsmokers did not find a statistically significant increase in risk? What basis is there then for alarming the public about ETS?
7. Federal and private studies agree that more than 95 percent of indoor air quality problems are caused by non-tobacco factors. What good is it to lull people into a false sense of complacency about indoor air problems like Legionnaires' disease when smoking bans deal with less than 5 percent of the total problem?

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8. Everyone knows that there can be a world of difference between laboratory conditions and the "real world." One December 1986 study shows that you would have to work more than 24 days nonstop in a typical office to absorb the nicotine "equivalent" of one cigarette. In a restaurant, it would take more than 17-and-one-half days in a row to reach the same level. How do these scientific findings make the case for banning or restricting smoking in the "real world"?
9. The prestigious British Journal of Cancer reviewed all existing studies about ETS in 1986 and concluded that there is little or no evidence currently showing cigarette smoke in the air harms nonsmokers. Can you tell me what is wrong with the conclusion of this major medical journal?
10. Much has been made of mortality estimates when it comes to ETS. One long-standing false impression is that the EPA has estimated that as many as 5,000 nonsmoker deaths each year are due to ETS. In fact, the EPA analyzed this "estimate" and termed it "crude" and "questionable." Are you aware that the numbers you are citing are not an official EPA estimate?

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APPENDIX B

(Editor/reporter)
(Title)
(News organization)
(Street Address)
(City County Zip code)

(Editor/reporter):

If you have time for nothing else, please read the next paragraph of this letter and put the enclosed card in your Rolodex ...

A simple request: When you write about tobacco, get both sides of the story. Call me or someone else at The Tobacco Institute, the trade association for U.S. cigarette manufacturers.

I'm asking for a fair shake. And it's a reasonable request.

There are two sides to the tobacco story, just like any other story. Too often, the reporting on tobacco is one-sided, with no effort made to seek out balancing comment or reaction.

Take the issue of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) and the health of nonsmokers. Whether you call it "second-hand smoke" or "passive smoking," it's a controversy among scientists. Yet many news reports have uncritically reported the politically-motivated statements of antismoking activists who grossly distort ETS science to get smoking restriction laws on the books.

Too often, the hard questions are not asked. Too often, the other perspective is not sought out. It shouldn't be like that and there's no reason it has to be like that.

The Institute has four spokespeople available to answer your questions and respond to requests for information. We have dozens of experts available on specific issues, including ETS. We would be more than happy to put these resources at your disposal.

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I hope that you will appreciate the spirit in which this letter was written. If you were not aware of what The Institute has to offer, fine, let's get to know each other. But, if you have known about us and have chosen not to contact us when tobacco stories have arisen, we've both got a problem. You're not writing a balanced story. And we're not getting a chance to provide information that belongs in every tobacco story.

Again, all I'm asking for is a fair shake -- and that means a fair story. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours,

Scott Stapf
Assistant to the President

enc.

(A double die-cut Rolodex card listing spokespeople and the "800" number.)

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TRUTH SQUAD -- DR. PETERSON AND DR. WEEKS

Truth Squad media tours are scheduled to begin in August. Eight tours are scheduled in 1987.

August - Miami, FL
September - Portland, OR
 Chicago, IL
October - New Orleans, LA
 New York, NY
November - Boston, MA
 San Francisco, CA
December - Atlanta, GA

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