

Big Tobacco Owes a Debt To City Firefighters (New York Daily News)**By KEVIN JAMES**

This month, Gov. Pataki signed the nation's first fire-safe cigarette act. While this promises to prevent cigarette-ignited fires after 2003, the question of restitution for the damage suffered by the victims of such fires goes unanswered.

One cigarette-ignited fire that cries out for justice occurred in 1998, just a week before Christmas, in a city-owned senior citizen housing complex in Brooklyn.

Firefighters can mount a compelling challenge against Big Tobacco by holding it accountable for the deaths in that inferno of hero Firefighters James Bohan and Christopher Bopp and Lt. Joseph Cavalieri.

One company that is especially vulnerable is Philip Morris, which successfully test marketed fire-safe Marlboros in 1987 but shelved the research until "public pressure builds unduly."

Rather than sell safe cigarettes, Philip Morris and its accomplices in Big Tobacco preferred to throw money at the fire services to turn them into allies against regulation of the industry.

Former Tobacco Institute Vice President Michael Brozek explained the need for such alliances in 1989: "A firefighter has unbelievable credibility walking into a legislative hearing. ... The last thing you wanted to see is a firefighter come in and talk about burned people."

Philip Morris boasted of its strategy to subvert the fire services at a 1984 workshop in Rye Brook, Westchester County, called "Dealing with Issues Indirectly: Constituencies."

According to the transcripts, a Philip Morris representative offered this advice: "You have to try to understand whom you have to neutralize in advance, who is a potential threat to you and then how do you make common cause with that category of individuals or companies or groups ... so that you can neutralize them."

"Example: The self-extinguishing cigarette. Who would normally be involved in the self-extinguishing cigarette on the other side of the fence? Probably the firefighting community. As you know in the United States, we have put a huge amount of time into helping all the organized groups of professional and

2082060620

volunteer firefighters. ... And then, when we need them to stand up and say, "not cigarettes" that cause fire in 99.9% of the cases, we get their cooperation.

"But that's because we have cultivated them and helped them achieve some of their goals. ... We had turned them around and made allies, third-party defenders for ourselves."

Philip Morris was wrong. Firefighters can be fooled, but they can't be bought. New York City fire organizations were the driving force behind Assemblyman Pete Grannis' (D-Manhattan) 18-year crusade to enact New York's historic legislation and have the strongest claim on Big Tobacco's smoke-stained profits.

Philip Morris and the Tobacco Institute should be made to pay dearly for trying to buy off the fire services instead of saving lives with a safer product.

*James is a supervising fire marshal for
the New York City Fire Department.*

Original Publication Date: 8/28/00

<< OLE Object: Picture (Metafile) >>

Gayathri Chandran
Media Affairs, PMUSA
917 663 2535