

Canadian Project

Imperial Tobacco Canada believe that the Group should have a Strategic Objective that can be expressed as:

"To work towards the discovery of a 'safe' cigarette, 'safe' in the eyes of those who say that the current cigarette is 'unsafe'".

They believe that this goal is essential if decline of cigarette usage is to be halted (since all problems facing the cigarette industry can be ultimately traced back to health perceptions, in IITL's view).

IITL have given limited exposure to this concept within the Group. Apart from the Imasco Board and BATCo Chairman, discussions have been largely confined to senior technical staff including the 1986 Research Conference. After outlining the objective, IITL have proceeded to consider a particular approach to the issue based on reduction or removal of components claimed to be undesirable. Both the original concept and the IITL approach to it have generated lively discussion.

In terms of the concept, whilst the desire to eliminate or even reduce the pressure from external bodies against the cigarette is unanimous, there is considerable doubt that this could be achieved by any technical approach in the light of current knowledge. There will always exist factions that oppose 'smoking' and these factions will constantly set new goalposts. Perhaps the most telling point is that it is doubtful whether any authority would underwrite today, a set of specifications for the product, which, if achieved, would be acknowledged as 'safe'.

So far, IITL have chosen to pursue the approach of identifying components of smoke which reputable external agencies, e.g. Surgeon General, have listed as undesirable with a view to reducing these below accepted threshold levels by product modification. They would attempt to demonstrate improvements in biological assays accompanying these changes.

This approach has been criticised on several grounds. The list of chemicals in smoke which 'in isolation' are biologically active, e.g. carcinogenic or mutagenic is long and grows continuously. There is no agreement on threshold levels for such materials (in the limit Sir Richard Doll claims one molecule is hazardous!). Thus, whilst the Surgeon General et al have highlighted certain chemicals, it must be seriously questioned that even if all were removed, whether the Surgeon General would then say the product is 'safe' or even 'safer'. Arguments over the use of bioassays as predictors of cigarette safety remain legion.

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The current Group Research Programme reflects the view that we believe we can anticipate the moves that Regulatory Authorities will ask the industry to make to its products, on a rolling 5-year timescale. In terms of reduction of specific smoke components, we have a meeting of the Scientific Research Group under Dr. Thornton (at which the best external consultants will attend) in early 1987, the sole function of which is to set priorities for the next 5 year period taking all factors into account.

An alternative approach to product modification that we foresee being pursued by Authorities is reduced tar/nicotine ratio. This is assuming increasing importance in our Group Research Programme.

In terms of biological testing, whilst we have terminated in-house animal work, we continually monitor developments externally and are quite prepared to increase external financing if any initiatives look important. We are also increasingly sponsoring research into disease mechanisms by leading medical researchers.

There is therefore a degree of similarity between the current BAT approach and that suggested by ITL. The difference probably lies in the perception by ITL that technical initiatives that can be identified now might one day result in acknowledgement that the product is 'safe' or even 'safer' and that a significant R&D resource should be devoted to this goal. BAT believe that, guided by Regulatory Authorities, we shall modify our product based on a rolling 5-year view, and we support basic research to know more about our product from the biological standpoint. ITL question whether this effort is sufficiently positive and whether sufficient resources are being devoted to this activity.

A.L. Heard/DET
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