

E.T.S. AUSTRALIA

Tobacco test case over cancer claim

By ANN WESTMORE

Australia's medical and scientific grants are heading for a courtroom battle which has worldwide implications for the tobacco industry over passive smoking.

In a test case soon to come before the Federal Court in Sydney, an eminent group of doctors and scientists will give evidence on behalf of the Australian Federation of Consumer Organisations which represents 58 consumer groups.

At issue is the tobacco industry's claim that "there is little evidence and nothing which proves scientifically that cigarette smoke causes disease in non-smokers".

The claim, made in newspaper advertisements placed by the Tobacco Institute in 1986 and then subsequently found to be false and misleading by the Trade Practices Commission, has not been corrected ade-

quately, argues the AFCO lobby. According to AFCO director Robin Brown, corrective statements published in 1987 were so obscure that "only the best informed people would know what they were on about".

"We are now seeking an order restraining the Tobacco Institute or its members from making similar statements in the future. They will then be unable to deny that the medical evidence exists."

He believes a ruling in AFCO's favour will give confidence to local, state and federal governments to take action to limit exposure to passive smoking.

"It will also encourage companies to take initiatives to ensure that work places are smoke-free."

"This case has implications that go beyond Australia as, to my knowledge, this is the first such case to come before a high court anywhere in the world."

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