

# Imps to test synthetic tobacco

BY SANDY McLACHLAN

IMPERIAL Group is to undertake consumer tests with cigarettes containing a synthetic tobacco substitute. The company anticipates that tests will start within two months and will involve a sample of 5,000-6,000 smokers. The substitute involved will be NSM a cellulose-based product developed jointly by ICI and ICI.

The Imperial move is likely to be followed swiftly by other companies. Gallaher yesterday announced that it would approach the Hunter Committee—set up by the last Government to advise on the health implications of synthetic tobacco—for approval to do its own consumer tests.

A spokesman for Carreras Rothmans said his company would do their testing when they felt the time was right.

Both Gallaher and Carreras Rothmans have contracted to take supplies of Control, another synthetic developed by the US, from Gitanes. Each emphasised last night, however, that they were still prepared to consider NSM as an alternative source of supply.

The decision by Imperial to expose members of the public to cigarettes containing its tobacco substitute NSM follows the confidential release of draft guidelines on the health implications of synthetic tobacco by the Hunter Committee.

Imperial has obtained the approval of the Hunter Committee to take its development of synthetic materials this stage further; since the work it has already done more than matches the provisional guidelines laid down.

There were signs last night, however, that a row may brew up over the fact that a company had been given the go-ahead while the health guidelines were still confidential and available only to companies with a commercial interest in synthetic tobacco products.

There were suggestions from some quarters of the medical profession that both the decision of the Hunter Committee and the evidence on which these were based should be open to independent scrutiny.

A spokesman for the Department of Health and Social Security commented that the Committee's deliberations were only provisional and that, anyway, the committee was set up only to advise the Secretary of State on the implications of synthetic tobacco products so that its views carried no legal significance.

It is believed that the draft guidelines are in fact incomplete and that they are simply the first step in what will be a long-term step by step process for controlling the development of synthetic smoking materials.

Imperial yesterday claimed the go-ahead from Hunter as the

Starting the search for a safer smoke Page 13

first time that any substitute smoking material had received clearance for consumer acceptance tests from a Government-appointed body.

Although the company would not make any claims about the safety of their synthetic product in cigarettes smoked normally by humans, Dr. Herbert Bentley, the company's research and development director, commented that laboratory tests showed NSM to be considerably less likely to produce cancer than natural tobacco.

These tests indicate that NSM contains a quarter as much tar as in tobacco and that this tar is less biologically active by a factor of five. In theory, therefore, NSM is 20 times less likely to cause cancer than tobacco itself and on this basis a cigarette containing 20 per cent NSM should be 19 per cent safer than an equivalent cigarette containing 100 per cent tobacco.

## Cigarette substitute tests for smokers

Up to 6,000 smokers are to be given the chance in the next few months to test cigarettes containing a tobacco substitute developed over seven years by Imperial Chemical Industries and Imperial Tobacco, Britain's biggest cigarette manufacturer (our Industrial Editor writes).

The Hunter committee, set up to advise the Government on the safety of new smoking materials, has approved these consumer tests.

Smokers' views will be sought on the acceptability of cigarettes containing up to half of a grey shredded material derived from Finnish wood pulp. That is a necessary prelude to mass marketing of new brands containing appropriate mixtures of natural tobacco leaf and the substitute.

Imperial Tobacco is building a £13m factory at Ardeer, Ayrshire. It will be completed next year, with an annual output of new smoking material of up to 30 million lb (about a tenth of the total United Kingdom cigarette consumption).

It is said that research data submitted to the Hunter committee to secure official consent for consumer acceptance studies, show that the material has only a quarter the amount of tar that real tobacco has, and is a fifth less biologically active in terms of cancer tests on the skin of mice. The smoke is said to have a much reduced irritant level, too.

Full details apparently are not being released, nor are the test guidelines that the Hunter committee, which comprises many leading medical scientists, has given to tobacco manufacturers in the interests of public safety. That is likely to produce some criticism from scientists as well as the anti-smoking lobby.

Further details, page 15

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