

'SAFE' TOBACCO TO BE TESTED BY 6,000

By DAVID LOSHAK, Health Services Correspondent

A NEW, tasteless and nicotine-free tobacco substitute, made of cellulose extracted from wood-pulp, will be included soon in cigarettes to be tried out by 6,000 selected members of the public.

Tests already carried out on mice show the substitute tobacco, known as "New Smoking Material," may be up to 20 times safer than tobacco.

Cigarettes will contain between 10 and 50 per cent. of the substitute material.

They will not be on general sale at first, but if they prove acceptable to guinea-pig consumers, may be on the market within two years.

Less irritating

Dr Herbert Bentley, research director of Imperial Tobacco, which has developed NSM in conjunction with Imperial Chemical Industries, said yesterday that it had been cleared for consumer acceptance trials by a committee of scientists under Prof. R. B. Hunter.

"NSM is the first substitute smoking material in the world to receive clearance for consumer acceptance studies from a Government-appointed body," he said.

Dr Bentley said that NSM yielded only a quarter as much tar, weight for weight, as tobacco, and that this tar was five times less "biologically active." It was also less irritating to the smoker.

Although no firm conclusions could be drawn from laboratory tests on animals, the indication is it might be up to 20 times safer for humans than ordinary tobacco.

Same satisfaction

Dr Bentley said that NSM in cigarettes would not reduce the satisfaction smokers already obtained. "But if the great British public proves us wrong, then the £15 million we have invested in our manufacturing plant will be down the drain."

Imperial Tobacco said the new material would be available to all cigarette producers. The company was not seeking a monopoly on its sale.

Dr Bentley said great care was being taken to ensure that NSM did not carry new risks for smokers. This might be even more important than reducing known risks.

Volunteer consumers will be

given 20-40 part-NSM cigarettes to try. They will be asked to comment on flavour, smoothness, strength, draw-resistance and appearance.

Although cigarettes containing NSM cannot go on the market until receiving final approval from the Hunter Committee, Imperial Tobacco and ICI are well advanced on building a £15 million plant to manufacture it at Ardeer, Ayrshire.

It will be the world's biggest producer of tobacco substitute and will have an annual capacity representing about 10 per cent. of total cigarette consumption in Britain.

Other companies are also working on tobacco substitutes. Carreras Rothman and Gallaher have signed contracts with the Celanese Corporation for its Cytrel material, made in America. Courtaulds have developed a similar material from cellulose.

Mr Tom Hurst, chairman of the National Society of Non-Smokers, said official approval for proceeding with tests of NSM on humans was unfortunate. "Smoking is a dirty and dangerous habit and it is a pity that the Hunter Committee should be willing to compromise with death."

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