

6,000 smokers to test 'safe' cigarette

By James Wilkinson

A NEW semi-synthetic cigarette made by Imperial Tobacco is to be tested by 6,000 smokers throughout Britain.

It is said to be less likely to cause lung cancer than conventional cigarettes.

The cigarette consists of a mixture of ordinary tobacco and "New Smoking Material," which is a form of cellulose made from pine trees.

Imperial Tobacco announced yesterday that the Government-appointed committee set up to advise on the safety of tobacco substitutes had given them the go-ahead to start consumer trials.

Dr. Herbert Bentley, Imperial's director of research and development, said: "The committee decided that our product has been sufficiently tested to make these trials acceptable but it will probably be about two years before a cigarette containing New Smoking Material is on the market."

Evidence

The committee was set up last year under Professor Robert S. Hunter, Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham University.

Professor Hunter said yesterday: "Substantial additional evidence will be required before there is any question of marketing this product."

"We gave them permission for this very limited study because we thought it reasonable for them to find out whether anyone would smoke it before the company spent large sums of money on making it."

Each smoker, chosen at random, will be given up to 40 cigarettes to try. They will then be asked questions about the taste and feel of the cigarette and whether the cigarette would be acceptable as an alternative to their normal brand.

The tobacco substitute is said to produce only a quarter of the tar produced by an equivalent weight of tobacco.

'Safer' smoke given go-ahead

By JOHN CUNNINGHAM, Social Services Correspondent

The first Government approved consumer tests in this country on cigarettes containing a tobacco substitute are to start soon.

The trials are to be carried out by the Imperial Tobacco Company and the cigarettes will contain between 10 and 50 per cent of modified cellulose—a neutral-tasting substance which grows naturally in many plants. It is hoped that the cancer risk to smokers will be sharply reduced, although the company is being cautious about this.

Dr Herbert Bentley, the company's research and development director, announced yesterday that the Hunter committee, a team of scientists set up by the Department of Health to study the safety and acceptability of synthetic cigarettes, has cleared the way for consumer trials. These will involve up to 6,000 smokers in all parts of the country, who will be given not more than two packets to sample.

Dr Bentley said in London: "We believe that New Smoking Material (NSM is a name registered by the group) is the first substitute smoking material in the world to receive clearance for consumer acceptance studies from a Government-appointed body."

Joint research by the company and Imperial Chemical Industries has so far shown that NSM yields considerably less tar than an equivalent weight of tobacco. Dr Bentley also claimed that the tar produced has a "greatly reduced biological activity and a less irritant smoke."

The authoritative assessment of how safe the substitute tobacco is and what protection it gives against cancer will be made eventually by the Hunter committee. But Dr Bentley said experiments on the incidence of skin cancer in mice had shown that weight for weight, NSM yielded only one quarter of the tar of tobacco; and that the biological activity of the tar produced—its cancer-producing risk—was only one fifth of tobacco.

Dr Bentley added, however, that it would not be sensible to infer from these findings that the same results would occur in tests on people. The question of whether NSM is entirely safe would be for Professor Hunter and his colleagues.

In spite of this caution, the company is making a major investment in the production of the substitute tobacco. It has already spent £1.5 millions on research and is opening a £13 millions factory at Ardeer, Ayrshire.

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