

£10m FACTORY WILL MAKE SAFER 'WOOD TOBACCO'

By Dr ANTHONY MICHAELIS, Science Correspondent

A WOOD-BASED tobacco substitute will provide 10 per cent. of the contents of cigarettes smoked in Britain by 1975 if plans announced yesterday do not run into snags.

The substitute, called NSM (new smoking material), will be produced at a £10 million factory to be built at Ardeer, Ayrshire. By 1975 output should reach 10,000

tons a year.

It will cost about the same as tobacco and according to the 1971 Finance Act, normal duty will be paid.

Plans for the factory were announced jointly by Imperial Tobacco and ICI.

Dr H. R. Bentley, research director for Imperial Tobacco, said at a Press conference that the substitute caused cancer five times less than ordinary tobacco as determined by painting the material on the skin of mice. "However it is difficult to extrapolate this result to human beings."

This is apparently the first admission by Imperial Tobacco that tobacco can cause cancer, although the Tobacco Research Council—of which Imperial Tobacco is a member—admitted in its 1965-66 report that skin tumours had been caused on mice.

Inquiry committee

A note of caution about NSM was sounded by Dr Bentley. "We must await the conclusions of Prof. Hunter's committee before human volunteers can test the new material," he said.

It was announced on March 7 that the Government had appointed Prof R. B. Hunter, Vice-chancellor of Birmingham University, to be chairman of an independent committee "to consider the testing of new smoking materials."

Both ICI and Imperial Tobacco emphasised yesterday that it was too early to come to any medical conclusions but that they had enough confidence in preliminary tests to go ahead with commercial production provided Prof. Hunter's committee had no final objections.

Mr Anthony Garrett, chairman of Imperial Tobacco, said that NSM would have a large world market. It would be used up to a 20 per cent. proportion in a mixture with ordinary tobacco in cigarettes and it would be freely available to all cigarette manufacturers.

The raw material will be Scandinavian wood pulp of high purity and chemically treated at the factory to produce a low-tar substitute for tobacco.

NSM cigarettes were distributed after yesterday's Press conference. Most smokers who tried them said they could taste no difference from all-tobacco cigarettes.

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£10m plant to make tobacco substitute

By Peter Hill

Plans to invest more than £10m in a plant to produce a tobacco substitute in commercial quantities were announced yesterday by Imperial Tobacco.

The substitute—New Smoking Material (NSM)—based on cellulose from wood pulp will be mixed with tobacco in Imperial's existing brands and, providing the product receives clearance from the Government-appointed Hunter Committee, the plant should be producing about 10,000 tons of NSM by late 1975.

This project follows seven years of research and development between Imperial and ICI which has borne most of the £3.5m invested in research and development.

The two companies formed Imperial Developments Limited in which ICI has a two-thirds stake and Imperial one-third, to carry out research and marketing of NSM. The research work has been largely undertaken at ICI's organics division premises at Ardeer, Ayrshire, where the new factory will be located and which is expected to provide employment for about 200 people.

The new company has licensed Imperial Tobacco to produce NSM and under the terms of an agreement Imperial Tobacco will have access to the research accumulated by the joint com-

pany in return for a 10 per cent royalty payment on sales.

All sales in Britain and overseas will be handled by the joint company which will also be responsible for the further development and exploitation of NSM.

Mr Anthony Garrett, chairman of Imperial Tobacco, said at a press conference in London yesterday: "I believe that there will be a considerable demand for NSM from all over the world. But I do not see natural tobacco being displaced in the foreseeable future."

Imperial's policy, he explained, will be to introduce NSM in mixtures of up to 20 per cent with natural tobacco in cigarettes already manufactured by the group—the dominant tobacco group in the United Kingdom with some 70 different brands. But, he added, this would not preclude the launching of a totally new brand at some stage and in any case each packet would carry a description of what the cigarettes contained.

Mr Garrett, when asked about the likely price of the NSM-blended cigarettes, said that he did not expect that they would be any cheaper than existing cigarettes made wholly from natural tobacco.

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