

Tuesday 8 August 1972  
Written Answer

PQ 3470/1971/2  
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TAR AND NICOTINE CONTENT OF CIGARETTES

Dr Tom Stullaford (C. Norwich, South)

To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, if he will make a statement on the publication of tar and nicotine yields of cigarette brands, and related matters.

SIR KEITH JOSEPH

On 16 March of last year I announced that I was setting up in association with my right hon Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales a Standing Scientific Liaison Committee, to advise on the scientific aspects of smoking and health. The House will remember that this Committee consists of independent scientists and scientists from my Department and from the tobacco industry. One of its tasks was to "devise satisfactory methods of determining for publication the tar and nicotine yield of the various brands of cigarettes on the market". I have received the Committee's first Report and I am today making it widely available, and a copy has been placed in the Library. The Report must not be taken as indicating or implying that the industry has expressed any view about the medical advice (upon which the report is based) on the relationship between smoking and health. This is not a matter on which I have sought advice from the industry. The participation of the industry members in this Report has been directed to the complex problem involved in assessing the tar and nicotine yields of cigarettes and to considering the most effective way of conveying the results to the public.

In general we have been able to accept the Committee's report. It endorses the value of encouraging those who cannot stop altogether to choose brands with a lower tar and nicotine yield and it suggests satisfactory methods of sampling and testing. Testing arrangements are in hand and should lead to a first publication of lists of brands, in order of their tar yield, in the New Year. I propose to support this information by advising those who must smoke to choose brands with lower levels of tar.

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I have also agreed with the industry that where they already insert coupons into cigarette packs they will print on the reverse of this material certain Government advice about safer smoking habits. Detailed arrangements are currently under discussion with the industry.

I am discussing with the Health Education Council how they could most helpfully use some increase in their budget, particularly to steer people who cannot stop altogether towards less dangerous ways of smoking, and, most important of all, to experiment with ways of discouraging children from picking up the habit. My right hon Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is sending a pamphlet about smoking and health education to local education authorities for the use of schools. Similar action will be taken in Scotland and in Wales.

Much effort is being put into scientific research into attempts to produce a substitute smoking material which, when mixed in tobacco, would reduce those elements in cigarettes which medical opinion considers to be dangerous. It would be very wrong of me to raise false hopes, but there is clearly a need for these developments to succeed and the Standing Scientific Liaison Committee are considering the validity of testing which might be suitable for assessing the effects of the inclusion of new smoking materials in the production of cigarettes. The major interest and final responsibility must of course lie fairly and squarely on the manufacturers, but the Government will help in every way appropriate in the belief that in the longer term this may be a valuable solution for those who cannot be persuaded not to smoke.

I have discussed with the tobacco manufacturers the working of the voluntary agreement which I also announced last year. I have agreed with them some minor modifications to deal with points which have arisen since the agreement was made. Advertising films in cinemas will include a health warning; and so will cigarette advertisements which are disseminated through the post. The manufacturers will do their utmost to ensure that promotional offers are directed only to adult smokers so as to reduce the possibility of their coming into the hands of young people. The manufacturers have agreed with the television authorities that the authorities may obscure cigarette brand advertisements at sporting events, whether sponsored

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or not, which are otherwise likely to be exposed frequently or for long periods to television. Detailed arrangements are currently under discussion between the industry and the television authorities. Most cigarette brand advertisements at sports stadia already carry the warning reference, and all will by the end of the year.

I am publishing today the results of some work which has been done on the long term implications of cigarette smoking for the health service and social security funds.

Vol 313 c 1189-98