

BMB18.12.80STANCE ON SMOKING AND HEALTHNote for Information and DiscussionThe Situation

There is a growing feeling that the worldwide climate demands that the cigarette industry must change its stance on smoking and health if it is to regain or attain credibility. The present complex situation may be summarised:

1. Though it is rarely possible to prove or disprove causation for any specific health situation, there is well-documented evidence of a statistical association between smoking and risk of ill-health.
2. Without in any way accepting the allegation of causation, Industry has for the past 25 years used as a working model the assumption that there may be potentially harmful components in smoke. Although it has not established any causal links it has made progressive changes to its products to reduce the total intake of smoke by the smoker - in line with the requirements of a substantial body of consumers.
3. There is now increasing epidemiological evidence which some authorities believe indicates that the early move to filters has led to a significant reduction in associated risk. The present strong move to even lower deliveries, especially through ventilation, may continue the trend - and it is possible that the stage will eventually be reached where further epidemiological studies will not distinguish smokers of low delivery products from the background level of risk of the non-smoker.
4. Largely because of the US legal constraints, however, the Industry has not to date found a 'safe' way of communicating either the product changes or the encouraging medical evidence to consumers, doctors, authorities, the media or even to its own employees. (Communication by third parties cannot ever be relied upon to achieve this desired end.)
5. Because of this lack of response to the allegations, Industry has acquired a "presumption of guilt" posture in the eyes of most people.

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A Possible Change of Stance

Throughout this year, Public Affairs, Legal Department and R&D have been considering ways of breaking out of the dilemma without prejudicing the legal position. It happens that other companies or industry associations (Japan, Switzerland, South Africa,) are also beginning to react to the situation by issuing booklets to their employees. Unfortunately, however, they are tending to over-state the "causation is not proven" argument which we believe will not convince any audience - and will probably further reduce rather than raise the credibility of the Industry.

It is believed that a far better approach for the future will be to develop a stance based on three factors:

1. Industry acknowledges (but does not accept) the strong body of opinion that smoking is associated with risk.
2. Industry has been highly responsible in undertaking research and in working closely with medical authorities - while at the same time responding to the views of governments, the medical profession and the consumer by substantially reducing product deliveries. In doing this, it has met the increasing consumer demand for such products.
3. There is growing epidemiological evidence derived by third parties (who are themselves generally committed non-smokers) that supports the trend to lower deliveries.

Action to Date

The first adoption of this possible change of stance was the preparation of pages 6 and 7 of the new R&D Brochure (copies of which will be available at the BMB). The wording was considered in detail by the Legal Department, the TEC, the Group Legal Conference and, finally, by B&W (Dr Hughes and Mr Pepples). Although the Brochure itself will not be a major vehicle of change, it does represent the first positive step in a new direction.

Another step has been the two meetings held at Southampton, first with the BMA Secretary and Chairman of the Board of Education and Science, and later with the full Board - both of which gave open and genuine support to the new approach of open communication. The subsequent decision of the BMA following the second meeting not to press for the abolition of advertising other than at point of sale, was

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conditional on advertisements emphasising that the "product of the '80's" gives lower deliveries than that of the '60's. We shall lose their good will if, as an Industry, we do not in the future disseminate information in this way.

A current major action is the preparation of a booklet for BAT employees by a small group comprising Public Affairs Millbank and UK&E, Legal Department and R&D. The aim is to combine two existing draft booklets prepared by Public Affairs Millbank and UK&E, and at the same time to intersperse sections containing realistic accounts of the basic controversy and of the emerging medico-scientific evidence that supports the change to low delivery products.

Another plan is that a video-tape recording is made of a talk on the general subject - basically on the lines of my recent talk at the Latin American Public Affairs Conference. After full vetting by the Legal Department, (and probably by Shook-Hardy and Bacon in the US) it will be available for wider use within the Group.

The Future

If we are to take the initiative in adopting a modified stance, we must plan very carefully how we are to prepare material and promote the activity - both within and outside the Group. It is essential that we communicate the outline of any change in stance clearly and swiftly to the Operating Companies - both to forewarn them of what is to come, and to prevent any confusion or conflict of action between Operating Companies and the Centre.

The type of actions that can be considered in due course include:

- invitation to bodies such as 'Hunter' Committee, DHSS, BUPA and selected MP's to visit GR&DC.
- similar invitations to selected general and scientific press.
- advertisements on the lines of those issued in 1978 by Imperial (copy attached) - but with more reference to the 'three factors'

We must avoid at all costs falling into a half-way position whereby we fail to make real progress, but merely muddy the waters at this most critical time. Whatever we do must be capable of defence against our most active detractors, who will become aware of our actions and will probably obtain copies of much of our material.

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We must also be able to show that our "new stance" is in no way an admission of the causation issue, but rather a responsible response to a genuine demand created by our detractors.

The above remarks apply to the BAT Group. In due course, we must also make plans to discuss and, if necessary, defend our initiative with competitors, industry associations and INFOTAB. It would not seem feasible to attempt to get their support in advance of our action.

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