

Light and Mild Cigarettes - FACT SHEET

The tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide (CO) levels of Australian cigarettes are monitored by laboratory testing. Laboratory machines take puffs from cigarettes and measure nicotine intake and tar and CO output. Readings from machines inform the numbers on packets.

Many low tar cigarettes have tiny ventilation holes around the filter of the cigarette, which permit air to be drawn in to dilute the smoke. When the laboratory machines test low tar cigarettes, air is drawn in through the ventilation holes, impacting the readings given by the machine.

People smoke cigarettes differently to laboratory machines. When people smoke low tar cigarettes, they usually cover up the holes with their fingers – without even knowing the ventilation holes exist. When these holes are blocked, more tar and nicotine is inhaled by the person. Smokers will also inhale more deeply and more frequently to achieve satisfactory nicotine 'hits'. For these reasons the Australian government banned the sale of any cigarettes with light and mild descriptors.

What the tobacco companies always knew...

The tobacco industry has known since the 1970's that machines smoke differently than people. Outcomes from law cases in Canada and the USA have exposed secret tobacco industry documents that show the depth of the tobacco industry's deception.

The tobacco companies knew about the role of nicotine in making smokers 'compensate' in order to get the same dose : *"The smoker ... who smokes to maintain a constant blood level of nicotine is most likely trying to avoid the unpleasant sensations that he feels when he is not smoking. Without a cigarette he will become nervous, irritable and likely to make mistakes in his work. Such a smoker is likely to compensate for changed delivery if given a cigarette brand with different standard machine smoked deliveries to his usual brand so that as far as possible he maintains a constant blood level of nicotine."* (BAT Co., 1978) [1]

The tobacco companies deliberately marketed low tar cigarettes as a safer alternative. The tobacco companies knew that marketing 'light' and 'mild' cigarettes to customers would give them a false sense of smoking a 'safer' cigarette, resulting in many smokers switching over instead of quitting: *"All work in this area should be directed towards providing consumer reassurance about cigarettes and the smoking habit. This can be provided in different ways, e.g. by claiming low deliveries, by the perception of low deliveries and by the perception of "mildness". Furthermore, advertising for low delivery or traditional brands should be constructed in ways so as not to provoke anxiety about health, but to alleviate it, and enable the smoker to feel assured about the habit and confident in maintaining it over time."* (BAT Co., 1977) [2]

The tobacco companies failed to disclose this information to the public, and in fact intentionally withheld it: *"It is felt that the time is close when government agencies world-wide will take more notice of compensation — and of the scale of the differences, for a given commercial product, between smoking machine numbers and the dose of smoke actually obtained by smokers."* (3)

[1] David Creighton BAT Co. Compensation for Changed Delivery, 27th June, 1978. Source: Minnesota Trial Exhibit 11,089

[2] PL Short, BAT Co. Smoking and Health Item 7: the Effect on Marketing. 14th April 1977. Minnesota Trial Exhibit 10,585.

[3] British American Tobacco, "Research Conference, Pichlarn, Austria, 24-28 August 1981" (minutes), document classified as "restricted," available in the Guildford depository at Bates numbers 109882558-574, or on-line at <http://www.hlth.gov.bc.ca/guildford/pdf/083/00008383.pdf>