

INTERNATIONAL TOBACCO ACCOUNTABILITY Bulletin

News, Updates and Analyses of Issues Related to International Tobacco

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Tobacco Industry “Youth Smoking Prevention” Programs – I

Philip Morris, British American Tobacco, and Japan Tobacco Industry are collaborating on a sophisticated worldwide public relations campaign to advertise the tobacco industry’s support for “youth smoking prevention” programs, while aggressively fighting measures proven effective in reducing smoking rates.

A Global Sham

Philip Morris boasts on its website that the company is involved in more than 130 programs in nearly 70 countries. http://www.pmintl.com/corp_resp/youth.html

But the “youth smoking prevention” measures that the tobacco industry supports, e.g. minimum age laws, costly education programs, and “underage sale prohibited” signs on store fronts and cigarette packs, are inefficient, ineffective, and difficult to enforce. They may even promote youth smoking, presenting smoking as an “adult” activity – a theme long successful in promoting tobacco.

Some examples of tobacco industry “youth smoking prevention” programs from around the world:

Australia. A Philip Morris school curriculum shows a depressed young woman with the text: *I’VE GOT THE POWER... Be proud of who you are... Enjoy being yourself... Know when and how to choose the best... Take responsibility for your own decisions... TRUST YOUR OWN DECISIONS.* The message shares uncanny similarities with the company’s “Find Your Voice” advertising campaign for Virginia Slims cigarettes that targeted young women: *My voice reveals the hidden power within... I look temptation right in the eye and then I make my own decision.*

Bangladesh. In July 2001, British American Tobacco launched a “Youth Smoking Prevention” campaign, consisting of television ads, radio scripts, billboards, and stickers. The word “no” (connected to parental authority – which many youth want to rebel against), and an attractive image of smoke rings appears on the left side of the

billboard. On the right, a drab photo of six young people is accompanied by the line, “We don’t smoke.” The ad stands in great contrast to the flashy, sophisticated Benson & Hedges billboards that glamorize smoking.

Turkey. Philip Morris donated \$100,000 to the Faculty of Education at Bosphorus University in 2000 to run a school project entitled “The Power is Yours.” The project was to teach students about decision making, without mentioning smoking. The involvement of a prestigious university would have given the program legitimacy. Turkish tobacco control advocates led a successful campaign to halt the program.

Hypocrisy is the Name of the Game

The tobacco industry’s youth education programs avoid the very strategy that has proven most effective in reducing teen smoking rates and in mobilizing youth tobacco control advocates: *exposing the truth about tobacco industry manipulation and deception.*

Meanwhile, the tobacco industry continues to sponsor sports and cultural events around the world that are popular with teens. Recently in Burkino Faso, Philip Morris held a Marlboro concert at which free cigarettes were distributed to youth.

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