

SMOKEFREE COALITION ENCOURAGES PUBLIC TO DOB IN THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY

For immediate release, 20 June 2006

Tobacco companies continually flout the law and deliberately deceive New Zealanders, and the Smokefree Coalition is encouraging the public to dob them in.

“New Zealanders have a mindset of indifference towards the tobacco industry – we are seemingly willing to accept its deadly lies. The industry in New Zealand is literally getting away with murder,” says Smokefree Coalition Director Mark Peck.

“We have legislation in this country that forbids traders from misleading the public about the nature of their products. Let’s use it. The Fair Trading Act is designed to protect people from deceit or unfair treatment – and tobacco companies are masters at both.”

He said a recent example was statements made by the industry denying the harmful effects of second-hand smoke.

“These were false statements deliberately designed to confuse people about the risks associated with exposure to tobacco smoke. They mirror tobacco industry statements as late as the 1990s claiming that smoking wasn’t addictive.”

He said that in Australia in the early 1990s, a consumer organisation took the local Tobacco Institute to court on the issue of false information about second-hand smoke. The court said that the industry could not describe second-hand smoke as not being shown to be unsafe.

The Coalition believes similar successes could be gained here if the public and Government truly had the will to get behind legal action.

Mr Peck said that while ministries and officials had contemplated legal proceedings against the tobacco industry in recent years, nothing had eventuated.

“The Government needs to receive a clear message from smokers and non-smokers alike that they are no longer willing to be lied to by killers. Maybe then it will take the matter out of the ‘too hard’ basket and allocate the resources necessary to properly prosecute tobacco companies which break the law.

“We encourage the public to write letters of complaint about tobacco companies to the Minister of Consumer Affairs, the Minister of Health and to newspapers.”

[For further information, the public is directed to the Smokefree Coalition’s website: www.sfc.org.nz.]

ENDS

For more information

Mark Peck, Director Smokefree Coalition, 04 472 0157, 0274 461 650. E-mail: director@sfc.org.nz.

For media questions concerning the published research (see below) contact Dr Nick Wilson, (04) 4763646 or email: nick.wilson@otago.ac.nz

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

A research paper by Dr George Thomson and Dr Nick Wilson of the Wellington School of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Otago, published in the open access journal Australia and New Zealand Health Policy in December 2005, identifies four occasions where NZ Government agencies appeared to fail to enforce consumer protection law, despite apparent breaches by the tobacco industry and its allies in relation to statement on the safety of second-hand smoke. This paper can be accessed at <http://www.anzhealthpolicy.com/content/2/1/32>

The British American Tobacco web site contains deceptive statements about second-hand smoke, along with others that misrepresent the findings of the World Health Organization: “... we don't believe that it [second-hand smoke] has been shown to cause chronic disease, such as lung cancer, cardiovascular disease or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, in adult non-smokers.”

http://www.batnz.com/oneweb/sites/BAT_5LPJ9K.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/80256D0B004C1BC780256ABE005B6B21?opendocument&DTC=20040414

For information on the Australian court decision on passive smoking, upheld on appeal see: *British Medical Journal* 1993, 306:120-2.