

SMOKEFREE COALITION DELIGHTED AT TOBACCO INDUSTRY INQUIRY

For immediate release, 29 August 2006

The Smokefree Coalition is delighted that the Commerce Commission seems poised to begin investigating cigarette manufacturers in New Zealand. The Coalition lodged a complaint against British American Tobacco (BATNZ) under the Fair Trading Act 1986, alleging that the company made deliberately misleading statements about second-hand smoke, and about light and mild cigarettes.

The complaint, supported by many key health groups, the Consumers' Institute and leading academics, said that BATNZ played down the effects of second-hand smoke on its website by referring to research that was out of date and methodologically flawed.

At the time of the complaint, BATNZ's website said that "claims against environmental tobacco smoke have been overstated". This is an extremely unfunny joke according to Smokefree Coalition director, Mark Peck. "They chose to ignore current research which has found clear and damning evidence of the harms of second-hand smoke in favour of an old study that they neglected to mention was funded by the tobacco industry. If that's not deliberate deceit, then I don't know what is."

As recently as June this year, the US Surgeon General issued a report¹ that said second-hand smoke caused disease and premature death in children and adults who do not smoke. This report confirmed that second-hand smoke caused respiratory illness, coronary heart disease and lung cancer, and that there is no risk-free level of exposure.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2006.

The second part of the complaint alleged that light and mild cigarettes are deliberately misrepresented as having health benefits over full strength varieties, or are less addictive.

“Tobacco companies know full well that so-called light and mild cigarettes are just as addictive and harmful, and that in fact, people who smoke them tend to compensate by smoking more deeply or frequently,” Mark Peck said.

Tobacco companies in Australia will remove ‘light’ and ‘mild’ descriptors from their brands in a court-enforceable undertaking, and regulations are also being introduced in Canada to ban the terms.

“New Zealand authorities do not have a history of strong action against the tobacco industry,” says Mark Peck, “but the overseas examples and precedents are now there. There’s a growing feeling that the tobacco industry has been allowed to get away with lies and deception for far too long. Hopefully, that is about to change.”

For further information about the Commerce Commission complaint and the harm caused by second-hand smoke, see 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.