

Media Release: 25 November 2009

Smokefree Coalition (SFC)

JRA Best Workplaces Awards takes a risk calling BAT eligible and legitimate

Smokefree Coalition Director Dr Prudence Stone says British American Tobacco's nomination for a Best Workplaces Award is a slap in the face to the many New Zealanders grieving the 5000 deaths caused by smoking last year.

British American Tobacco has been nominated in the Small-Medium Workplace category of the JRA Best Workplaces Awards.

"I understand workers at BAT were asked to rank their workplace and that final judgement is based on these employee responses," Stone said.

"But of course a company that kills so many of its customers has to offer its employees great incentives to work for them; these employees are being asked to wear those deaths on their payroll."

When responding to letters sent from Stone, as well as Te Reo Marama's Director, Shane Kawanata Bradbrook, JRA Managing Director John Robertson explained that organisations were invited to register their interest in taking part in the Awards before surveys were sent to employees.

"This is the kind of opportunity tobacco companies seek out in order to represent themselves as respectable and responsible corporations, and JRA has not stopped to ask a few important questions before considering their eligibility, such as whether or not their product kills," Stone said.

The Māori Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into the Tobacco Industry is already calling for submissions into the operations of BAT within New Zealand, with particular interest in the consequences of tobacco use for Māori. Stone warned Mr Robertson that once this Inquiry goes public next year, BAT might not look so respectable or responsible, and this would be an embarrassment to the Awards.

Kawanata Bradbrook and Stone both received standard responses from Robertson, saying, "Whilst we respect your opinion and the opinion of the organisation you represent, we do not believe it is JRA's place to make a value judgement on the business activities of any of our participants."

However, Stone said that a value judgement is precisely what an award is.

"You give and receive awards based on judgements according to specific criteria. Obviously the value of life is not one of the criteria in this particular award."

Kawanata Bradbrook said, "This is about BAT maintaining its image, and its product's image, as 'normal' and decent within New Zealand, when it's not.

"It is not normal to kill half your customers, and it is certainly not normal to ask your employees to market a killer product within New Zealand."

The JRA Best Workplaces Awards ceremony takes place Thursday night, 26 November.

For more information contact:

Prudence Stone, Director
The Smokefree Coalition
04 472 0157 | 0276 482 020