THE BOTTOM LINE – PROFIT ABOVE HEALTH.

Case Study: The Tobacco Industry

The outstanding model for a study of obstructive industry strategies is the tobacco industry.

Strategies which have succeeded in assuring the perpetuation and escalation of risks to public health, both from the inhalation of and exposure to tobacco smoke, serve as a warning of the kinds of actions and reactions we can expect from corporations faced with any large-scale consumer or public action linking their products to breast cancer.

While industry retaliation, more often than not, signifies success in hitting the mark for campaigners, it can also signify the starting point for the roll out of industry tactics to counter consumer and public health concerns.

It’s therefore useful, from the outset, to be aware of the range of strategies used by the tobacco industry

Some of these are:

- Blanket denial of harm to public health
- Call for irrefutable proof/evidence of harm
- Refuting findings of real/independent science
- Using research findings of scientists in pay of industry
- Delaying tactics e.g. calling for endless research
- Undermining or distorting co-opted science to match industry position
- Alarming public health opposition with threats of high cost litigation
- Use of company stooges at public hearings and meetings
- Setting up front groups to work at community/public level

After more than half a century of legal, ethical and public battles with the tobacco industry, some governments have acted upon the research findings of independent scientists by

- Increasing taxes on tobacco products
- Providing public information warning of health risks from smoking tobacco products
- Banning smoking in public spaces e.g. theatres, trains, restaurants, shops.
- Establishing clinics to help people overcome addiction to smoking.

From Pink to Prevention
www.frompintoprevention.org
- Encouraging the setting up of community organisations to help people quit smoking
- Enforcing a plain packaging rule on tobacco companies via legislation
- Enforcing the inclusion of highly visible health warnings on packaging via legislation.
- Enforcing inclusion of highly visible images of tobacco-related diseases on packaging via legislation.
- Enforcing limits to tobacco company advertising via legislation.
- Enforcing hidden/under-counter marketing of tobacco products via legislation.

No one today can be unaware of the health risks associated with smoking.

**We believe there are strong parallels with key factors affecting breast cancer and the constant effort to marginalise critical factors linked to environment and occupational risks.**

To become equally well-informed consumers with regard to risks from products containing ingredients implicated in breast cancer is the first-base position we aim for in gaining the serious attention of both industry and government regarding their responsibilities for protecting citizens from the numbers of man-made toxins known to harm human health.

Our particular focus is on MERCs linked to breast cancer and we look forward to the day when, as with tobacco, the full picture will be presented to the public and acted upon.

The irony, in the case of the tobacco industry, is that the industry whose obstructive strategies continue to perpetuate a serious risk to public health is itself kept in a very healthy state by the very population it harms.