

Cigarette ads have tobacco foes fuming

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A green cigarette? New magazine ads touting cigarettes with "additive-free" organic tobacco use the term "eco-friendly," prompting anti-smoking activists to fume.

The ads for Natural American Spirit cigarettes make the claim next to a list of environmental efforts by the manufacturer, Santa Fe Natural Tobacco Co. They began appearing in March in magazines such as Esquire, Field & Stream, Wired, Mother Jones, Elle and Marie Claire.

"It's an egregious ad. It's trying to greenwash a deadly and addictive product," says Vince Willmore of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, adding research shows cigarettes also are the No. 1 source of litter.

"When you hear a product is eco-friendly, you think it's better for you."

The tobacco company, owned by Reynolds American Inc., says it's not saying its cigarettes are safer but that its manufacturing is greener. It says its facilities are wind-powered, its farmers use fewer chemicals and 70 percent of its sales staff drive hybrid vehicles.

"We try to be good stewards of the environment," says spokesman Seth Moskowitz. Noting concern about littering of cigarette butts, he says a sister company helps fund Keep America Beautiful.

The magazine ads reflect the surging popularity of green marketing as more than 100 eco-related product labels are now used in the USA.

"This is a perfect example of why green marketing is broken," says Joel

Makower, executive editor of GreenBiz.com, which covers business environmental efforts. He says marketers latch on to anything that can be considered green so the term becomes meaningless.

Makower says the company may be accurate in describing its greening initiatives, which he welcomes, but adds, "Products that harm people should not be marketed as green,"

The tobacco company has faced similar complaints before. In 2000, after advertising its cigarettes as free of additives, the Federal Trade Commission negotiated a settlement that required it to include this statement: "No additives in our tobacco does NOT mean a safer cigarette." In 2010, after marketing its "organic" tobacco, 33 state attorneys general demanded the company include a statement saying the cigarette was not safer as a result.

The new ads include such disclaimers, but Willmore's group is again appealing to the attorneys general to take action.

"It is misleading to talk about being eco-friendly in a cigarette ad," given the problems of littering and secondhand smoke, says Jeanne Finberg, a deputy attorney general in California who focuses on [tobacco](#) litigation.

Says Makower: "The average person is going to look at that ad and ask, 'What are they smoking?'"

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