

Smokescreen lifted on tobacco industry tactics

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(Medical Xpress) -- A [new report](#) published today (Thursday) reveals how tobacco companies worked to prevent the strengthening of European tobacco legislation such as improvements to tobacco labelling and the removal of misleading terms such as 'light' and 'mild'.

The report was commissioned by the Smoke Free Partnership (SFP) through a Cancer Research UK grant and carried out by academic researchers at the University of Bath, University of Edinburgh, and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. It is being released on World No Tobacco Day which is themed "Tobacco Industry Interference".

Researchers reviewed previously secret corporate documents released after legal action in America. These were examined to understand the tactics used by the tobacco industry when the European Union was developing the Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) in 1999. The TPD is currently under review which makes this report particularly pertinent, as many of the same tactics are being employed once again.

Direct lobbying of politicians and civil servants who were seen to have particular influence over the shape of the new legislation was a key tactic. The German government and MEPs played an important role in this respect.

Indirect lobbying was also done through tobacco farmers, suppliers and distributors as well as engaging with trade organizations.

Three key arguments were used to argue against the legislation.

The legal argument was that the proposed measures to control tobacco were outside the EU's jurisdiction and that the directive was in breach of free trade agreements.

The economic argument stated that the TPD was a threat to jobs, with tobacco industry reports exaggerating job losses while ignoring the potential health benefits.

Scientific arguments exploited the lack of technical expertise within the European Commission on the complex issues surrounding the Directive. This enabled tobacco industry representatives to gain direct access to officials.

The tobacco industry made at least five legal challenges against the Directive. Despite these efforts the TPD was successfully adopted in 2001.

Documents also reveal that the [tobacco companies](#) were not entirely united in their approach to TPD. While some favoured tactics aiming to ‘block, amend or delay’ the directive others preferred a ‘constructive engagement’ approach.

The report provides a timely warning over tobacco industry tactics and the global WHO treaty on tobacco control, which was enacted after the TPD came into force, provides clear guidance for officials to avoid conflict of interests by meeting with the tobacco industry only when absolutely necessary . It also shows the public health community that it needs to strengthen its expertise in the areas of trade agreements, economics and science.

Jean King, Cancer Research UK’s director of tobacco control, said: “This report provides a timely reminder of tactics used by the tobacco industry. Attempting to better regulate how tobacco is sold is key to reducing the deadly impact that smoking has. The UK could become the first country in Europe to remove the glitzy, slickly designed packs currently used to market cigarettes. It’s important that Governments and the public are aware of tactics and arguments that are used to fight against proposals designed to help control a product that will kill half of all long term smokers.

“We know the tobacco industry fears the introduction of plain packaging but we believe it will give millions of children one less reason to start smoking. To make this happen we need to show public support for plain packaging, so every single name on our petition counts, please join us.”

Florence Berteletti, director of the Smoke Free Partnership, said: “It’s very important that members of parliament, civil servants and the public are aware of how the tobacco industry tries to interfere with tobacco regulation. It is interesting to see that the industry is using the same tactics - block, amend, and delay legislation - today as it did ten years

ago to influence the upcoming review of the Tobacco Products Directive, but with additional resources and at a larger scale.

“While the industry’s tactics have not changed in the last 12 years, support for tobacco control has definitely increased. The Framework Convention on [Tobacco Control](#), the world’s first international health treaty, has set out clear guidance on the best practice in public policy. The [tobacco industry](#) has powers but no legitimacy any longer. More and more policy makers recognize this and we look forward to working with them to ensure that the second revision of the Directive reflects the political commitment to combat tobacco use at EU level.”

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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