

National poll: Many unaware of court findings against tobacco companies

November 7 2017



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On Nov. 26, Altria, Philip Morris USA, R.J. Reynolds and other tobacco companies will begin to publish court-ordered "corrective statements" about cigarettes, the result of a 2006 federal court verdict that found the companies in violation of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt

Organizations (RICO) Act. A recent national survey shows that many Americans are not aware of the information in the corrective statements or the major findings of the court.

The five court-ordered statements address 18 facts about [tobacco companies](#)' manipulation of [nicotine](#) levels, low tar or light cigarettes being as harmful as regular cigarettes, nicotine addiction, health effects of smoking, and health effects of secondhand smoke. The survey of 2,010 U.S. adults was conducted in May 2017 with funding from the Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center at the Stephenson Cancer Center.

"The survey shows many Americans are unaware of the information in the statements," said Dr. Robert McCaffree, Associate Director for Policy at the Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center. "Even fewer know about the major court findings that led to the racketeering verdict."

Among the 18 corrective statements, less than half of Americans said they are aware of the following:

- More people die every year from smoking than from murder, AIDS, suicide, drugs, car crashes, and alcohol combined. (36.5%)
- Smoking kills, on average, 1,200 Americans. Every day. (41.2%)
- "Low tar" and "light" cigarette smokers inhale essentially the same amount of tar and nicotine as they would from regular cigarettes. (45.5%)
- Cigarette companies control the impact and delivery of nicotine in many ways, including designing filters and selecting cigarette paper to maximize the ingestion of nicotine, adding ammonia to make the cigarette taste less harsh, and controlling the physical and chemical make-up of the [tobacco](#) blend. (47%)
- Secondhand smoke kills over 38,000 Americans each year. (47.1%)

- Altria, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco, Lorillard, and Philip Morris USA intentionally designed cigarettes to make them more addictive. (47.4%)

Among the ten major court findings surveyed, less than half of Americans said they are aware that the tobacco companies:

- Violated civil racketeering laws. (23.1%)
- Committed fraud. (32.1%)
- Are likely to continue to commit fraud. (37.0%)
- Denied that they control the level of nicotine to create and sustain addiction. (40%)
- Suppressed and concealed scientific research. (43%)
- Marketed low tar and light cigarettes as less harmful though they knew they were not. (45.3%)

Because the survey used an aided recall design, actual levels of public awareness may be lower than reported. The survey participants read each of the [statements](#) and findings before being asked if they had been aware of the facts before taking the [survey](#).

"These results could help guide efforts to remedy the effects from decades of tobacco [company](#) misinformation on both public awareness and public policies," said Dr. McCaffree. "Internal tobacco industry documents - many of which were used in the federal trial leading to the civil racketeering verdict - reveal in their own words how the companies deliberately misled the general public and lawmakers."

A one-page executive summary and a 10-page preliminary report is available online at otrc.stephensoncancercenter.org/policy.

Provided by University of Oklahoma

Citation: National poll: Many unaware of court findings against tobacco companies (2017, November 7) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-11-national-poll-unaware-court-tobacco.html>

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