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## THE USUAL SUSPECTS INDUSTRY HACKS TURN FEAR ON ITS HEAD

*by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber*

A number of leading figures in the anti-environmental "sound science" movement have teamed up to launch a new front group aimed at smearing environmental and health activists as behind-the-scenes conspirators who "sow health scares to reap monetary rewards."

In August, the "No More Scares" campaign announced its formation at a Washington, DC press conference attacking Fenton Communications, one of the few public relations firms that represents environmental advocacy groups. No More Scares spokesman Steven Milloy used the press conference to release a report titled "The Fear Profiteers," which described Fenton as the "spider" at the center of a "tangled web of non-profit advocacy groups."

*Inside PR*, a public relations industry trade publication, termed the press conference "an unprecedented attack" and noted that "Steven Milloy and his colleagues . . . could scarcely have timed their tirade against Fenton Communications and the public interest groups it represents any worse. As Milloy and his cohorts accused consumer activists of provoking unnecessary alarm among the public, Ford and Bridgestone/Firestone were providing consumers with a stark reminder of the

## FLACK ATTACK

*PR Watch* has reported in the past on the antics of Steven Milloy and his "Junk Science Home Page." His tobacco connections, however, were first revealed on April 8 in the *Lancet*, England's leading medical journal. The *Lancet* story detailed a covert industry campaign in the 1990s to undermine scientific evidence linking tobacco smoke to health problems in non-smokers. The campaign was prodigiously expensive, international in scope, and even reached into the editorial offices of the *Lancet* itself.

For more than 50 years the tobacco industry has been a leading corrupter of science and government. Virtually every corporate hack in America has belied up to the tobacco trough at one time or another, and their names appear in its internal documents, many of which are now online. (A list of internet archives

appears on the website of Americans for Nonsmokers Rights at <<http://www.no-smoke.org/internal.html>>.)

The *Lancet* story inspired our own visit to the tobacco archives as we were researching a new book by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber. Titled *Trust Us, We're Experts: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles With Your Future*, it will be published by Tarcher/Putnam in January. This issue draws heavily on that research, which shows that many so-called defenders of "sound science" are in fact industry-funded enemies of *any* science, no matter how rigorous, that justifies regulations to protect public health.

Steven Milloy and his cohorts pose as reforming crusaders with a mission to eliminate fraud and corruption in science. The reality is quite the opposite. Tobacco hacks are not reformers, and organizations that cannot tell whether tobacco science is junk science have little right to pose as society's scientific arbiters.

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important role these self-appointed watchdogs perform as a necessary counterbalance to untrammelled corporate power and as a source of pressure on recalcitrant regulators. . . . Over the years consumer and environmental activists have done far more good than harm. Thanks to the work of those who agitate for social change, the roads have become safer; the environment has become cleaner; food has become more nutritious; consumers are in general far better informed about the products they buy; and workers are in general better rewarded and at less risk of injury or abuse.”

The same cannot be said for the principal figures in the “No More Scares” campaign. Co-editors of “The Fear Profiteers” included Milloy, Bonner Cohen, John Carlisle, Michael Fumento, Michael Gough, Henry Miller, Kenneth Smith and Elizabeth Whelan. All have a track record of accepting funding from and defending industries that make dangerous products and pollute the environment. Many, including Milloy himself, have been outspoken apologists for the tobacco industry, one of the deadliest consumer products.

## CHARACTERS FROM CENTRAL CASTING

*Steven Milloy* publishes the “Junk Science Home Page” ([www.junkscience.com](http://www.junkscience.com)), which claims to debunk “bad science used by lawsuit-happy trial lawyers, the ‘food police,’ environmental Chicken Littles, power-drunk regulators, and unethical-to-dishonest scientists to fuel specious lawsuits, wacky social and political agendas, and the quest for personal fame and fortune.”

Using schoolyard taunts and accusations of “mindless anti-chemical hysteria,” Milloy routinely attacks the world’s most prestigious scientific journals, including *Science*, *Nature*, the *Lancet*, and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. A former lobbyist for the tobacco industry, Milloy is also a former executive director of The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, a front group created by Philip Morris to attack the Environmental Protection Agency’s risk analysis of second-hand cigarette smoke. (For details, see page 5.)

*Bonner Cohen* edits a newsletter called *EPA Watch*, which accuses the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of everything from destroying the U.S. economy to trying to stop people from taking showers. A Philip Morris strategy document describes *EPA Watch* as an “asset” created by PM funding allocated “to establish groups . . . that have a broader impact for PM.”

Another Philip Morris strategy memo discusses plans to promote “EPA Watch/Bonner Cohen as expert on EPA matters, i.e., regular syndicated radio features on EPA activities, . . . news bureau function, speaking

engagements, whatever can be done to increase his visibility and credibility on matters dealing with the EPA.”

*EPA Watch* is published by the American Policy Center (APC), headed by long-time PR pro Thomas DeWeese. APC weighs in on what can safely be called the looney fringe of the sound science movement. One issue of the APC’s newsletter, for example, attacks long-time environmentalist and author Jeremy Rifkin as “anti-industry, anti-civilization, anti-people” and accuses him of preaching “suicide, abortion, cannibalism and sodomy.”

*John Carlisle* works for the National Center for Public Policy Research (NCPPI), which was formed in the 1980s to support the Reagan administration’s military adventures in Central America. It now calls itself a “communications and research foundation dedicated to providing free market solutions to today’s public policy problems.” Its projects include Project 21, a conservative African American organization that has been funded by R.J. Reynolds and whose chairman, Edmund Peterson, opposed the FDA’s tobacco regulation and other government policies to reduce tobacco use.

A 1995 memo from Philip Morris staffer Francis Gomez describes NCPPI president Amy Moritz Ride-nour as “a willing ally,” noting that she had just called his office “offering to use any information we can provide [regarding] the current anti-tobacco onslaught. . . . Tom Borelli and I have both been in touch with Amy on various issues and are awaiting proposals for use of an internet website as an accessible repository of PM-related information.”

Page 12 of this issue describes *Michael Fumento*’s role in circulating misleading tobacco propaganda. His resume reads like a directory of conservative think tanks: the Competitive Enterprise Institute, Consumer Alert, and *Reason* magazine—all recipients of tobacco funding. He is currently a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank that spent the 1960s and 1970s envisioning nuclear war scenarios and defending the war in Vietnam, and now devotes itself to attacking environmentalists and defending industry.

Microbial geneticist *Michael Gough*, a former manager of the Biological and Behavioral Sciences Program at the congressional Office of Technology Assessment, oversaw a government inquiry which investigated the Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange and found no adverse effects. In contrast with many people who have studied the subject, Gough has been quoted saying that the risk of cancer from dioxin “may be zero.”

When he worked for the government, Gough took a hard line against tobacco. In 1990, he wrote a letter rebuffing an approach from Tom Borelli of Philip Morris regarding the issue of secondhand smoke. "Anything that reduces smoking has substantial health benefits, and making smokers into pariahs, for whatever reasons, does just that," he wrote. Industry apologists have occasionally cited Gough's comments as evidence of the government's "unscientific" bias against tobacco.

These opinions, however, have not prevented Gough from working closely with Steven Milloy. Both he and Milloy currently work for the libertarian Cato Institute, under whose auspices they have published a book together, titled *Silencing Science*. Cato receives funding from both Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds, and its board of directors includes media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who also sits on the Philip Morris board. Not surprisingly, the Cato Institute has been a fierce defender of the tobacco industry, in publications such as 1998's "Lies, Damn Lies and 400,000 Smoking-Related Deaths," which claims that tobacco is "far less pernicious than Americans are led to believe. . . . The government should stop lying and stop pretending that smoking-related deaths are anything but a statistical artifact."

*Kenneth Smith* is deputy editor of the *Washington Times* editorial page, in which capacity he has polemicized in defense of leaded paint, biotech foods, DDT and Love Canal.

Among the authors of "The Fear Profiteers," *Elizabeth Whelan* is unique in being a strong critic of tobacco's health effects. On most other environmental and health issues, however, she has been a reliable industry ally, as we have reported in past issues of *PR Watch*.

### **SOME FEARS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS**

In the No More Scares attack on Fenton Communications, Carlisle described the PR firm as "the hub of many of the biggest health scares of the last 12 years. From the deep pockets of charities like the W. Alton Jones Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts and Tides Foundation to businesses like Ben & Jerry's and personal injury lawyers to the on-the-ground activist groups like the NRDC, Environmental Working Group and Public Citizen, Fenton makes money making the scares work."

In September, the No More Scares campaign unleashed a second salvo, this time aimed at organic food sellers. Titled "Organic Industry Groups Spread Fear for Profit," the report claimed to detail a "multi-decade marketing campaign by organic and natural products retail interests promoting false or misleading food safety and fear campaigns to promote organic product sales."

When it comes to deceptive scares involving organic foods, however, No More Scares seems to have a double standard. Alex Avery, one of the authors of the No More Scares report on organic foods, is the son of Dennis T. Avery, an "adjunct scholar" at the Hudson Institute and author of the anti-environmentalist tract, *Saving the Planet with Pesticides and Plastic*.

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Like his son, Avery the senior does not merely champion the idea that conventionally-grown foods are safe. He has gone further, claiming that organic food is actually *more* dangerous than foods grown using synthetic pesticides. Avery says that “people who eat organic and ‘natural’ foods are eight times as likely as the rest of the population to be attacked by a deadly new strain of E. coli bacteria (0157:H7).” This happens, he says, because organic food is grown in animal manure. He claims his data comes from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the federal agency that tracks outbreaks of food-borne illness.

In reality, organic food is no more likely to be grown in animal manure than nonorganic food. The CDC vigorously denies Avery’s claim and has even gone to the unusual step of issuing a news release disavowing it. Nevertheless, Avery’s message has been repeated in media op-ed pieces written by Avery with titles such as “Organic Foods Can Make You Sick” and in news stories by the *Wall Street Journal*, the Associated Press, and numerous other publications in the United States and Europe.

In February 2000, Avery was the featured expert for a *20/20* story by television reporter John Stossel which speculated that “buying organic could kill you.” Stossel’s piece made no mention of Avery’s affiliation with the Hudson Institute, let alone any mention of the institute’s corporate funding from agricultural and agribusiness heavyweights including Monsanto, Du Pont, Dow-Elanco, Sandoz, Ciba-Geigy, ConAgra, Cargill, and Procter & Gamble.

During the program, Stossel, who has a track record of airing stories with an anti-environmental bias, held up a bag of organic lettuce and confronted the head of the organic industry’s trade association. “Shouldn’t we do a warning that says this stuff could kill you and buying organic could kill you?” he demanded.

To drive his point home, he added that ABC News had commissioned its own studies comparing organic and conventional foods. The tests, he said triumphantly, found that neither organic nor regular produce had pesticide residues. The “real bad news for organic consumers,” he added, was that ABC’s tests had found higher risk in organic foods of poisoning from the deadly E. coli bacteria.

In reality, as the scientists hired by ABC News to conduct the tests readily admitted, they had not done any tests at all to measure pesticide residues, and their tests for bacteria had not produced the results that Stossel claimed. When these facts came to the attention of the Environmental Working Group, it attempted to contact

Stossel for a retraction. After ignoring repeated phone calls, emails, faxes and letters, ABC News rebroadcast the segment on two subsequent dates. It finally admitted the fabrication in August after the *New York Times* reported on it. ■

## NEW BOOK EXPLORES “POLITICS OF HEALTH”

*PR Watch* editors Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber are among the contributors to a new book from MIT Press titled *Reclaiming the Environmental Debates: The Politics of Health in a Toxic Culture*.

“An expanding array of hazardous substances poses an increasing threat to public health,” notes the book’s editor, Richard Hofrichter. “But what makes our society a toxic culture are the social arrangements that encourage and excuse the deterioration of human health and the environment. Elements of toxic culture include the unquestioned production of hazardous wastes, economic blight, substandard housing, chronic stress, exploitative working conditions, and dangerous technologies. Toxic culture is also a metaphor for the ways our language, concepts, and values frame debates, ignoring the political conflicts and power relations that influence public health.”

Contributors to the book include academics, political activists and artists. Essays range from critiques of the status quo to strategies for shifting public consciousness to create healthy communities. Topics covered include “The Social Production of Cancer,” by Sandra Steingraber; “The Ecological Tyranny of the Bottom Line: The Environmental and Social Consequences of Economic Reductionism,” by John Bellamy Foster; “The Globalization of Culture and Its Role in the Environmental Crisis,” by Joshua Karliner; and “Green Living in a Toxic World: The Pitfalls and Promises of Everyday Environmentalism,” by Marcy Darnovsky.

Peter Montague, the editor of *Rachel’s Environment & Health Weekly*, describes *Reclaiming the Environmental Debates* as “a little gem . . . filled with startling perspectives, innovative thinking, and good ideas for fixing what’s gone wrong.”

For ordering information, contact MIT Press ([www.mitpress.com](http://www.mitpress.com)).

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# How Big Tobacco Helped Create “THE JUNKMAN”

by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

In the biographical sketch that accompanies “The Fear Profiteers” (see cover story of this issue), Steven Milloy describes himself as the publisher of the Junk Science Home Page ([www.junkscience.com](http://www.junkscience.com)) and an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute. “Milloy appears frequently on radio and television; has testified on risk assessment and Superfund before the U.S. Congress; and has lectured before numerous organizations,” it adds, noting that he has also “written articles that have appeared in the *New York Post*, *USA Today*, *Washington Times*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, and the *Investors’ Business Daily*.”

These facts are all accurate as far they go, but they say nothing about how Milloy came to be a prominent debunker of “junk science.” This omission is undoubtedly by design, because it would certainly be embarrassing to admit that a self-proclaimed scientific reformer got his start as a behind-the-scenes lobbyist for the tobacco industry, which has arguably done more to corrupt science than any other industry in history.

Early in his career, Milloy worked for a company called Multinational Business Services, a Washington lobby shop that Philip Morris described as its “primary contact” on the issue of secondhand cigarette smoke in the early 1990s. Later, he became executive director of The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition (TASSC), an organization that was covertly created by Philip Morris for the express purpose of generating scientific controversy regarding the link between secondhand smoke and cancer.

## THE WHITECOAT PROJECT

One of the forerunners of TASSC at Philip Morris was a 1988 “Proposal for the Whitecoat Project,” named after the white laboratory coats that scientists sometimes wear. The project had four goals: “Resist and roll back smoking restrictions. Restore smoker confidence. Reverse scientific and popular misconception that ETS is harmful. Restore social acceptability of smoking.”

To achieve these goals, the plan was to first “generate a body of scientific and technical knowledge” through research “undertaken by whitecoats, contract laboratories and commercial organizations”; then “disseminate and exploit such knowledge through specific communication programs.” Covington & Burling, PM’s law firm, would function as the executive arm of the Whitecoat Project, acting as a “legal buffer . . . the interface with the operating units (whitecoats, laboratories, etc.)”

The effort to create a scientific defense for secondhand smoke was only one component in the tobacco industry’s multi-million-dollar PR campaign. To defeat cigarette excise taxes, a Philip Morris strategy document

outlined plans for “Co-op efforts with third party tax organizations”—libertarian anti-taxation think tanks, such as Americans for Tax Reform, Citizens for a Sound Economy, Citizens for Tax Justice and the Tax Foundation. Other third party allies included the National Journalism Center, the Heartland Institute, the Claremont Institute, and National Empowerment Television, a conservative TV network.

In one memo to Philip Morris CEO Michael A. Miles, vice president Craig L. Fuller noted that he was “working with many third party allies to develop position papers, op-eds and letters to the editor detailing how tobacco is already one of the most heavily regulated products in the marketplace, and derailing arguments against proposed bans on tobacco advertising.”

Through the PR firm of Burson-Marsteller, Philip Morris also created the “National Smoker’s Alliance,” a supposedly independent organization of individual smokers which claimed that bans on smoking in public places infringed on basic American freedoms. The NSA was a “grassroots” version of the third party technique, designed to create the impression of a citizen groundswell against smoking restrictions. Burson-Marsteller spent millions of dollars of tobacco industry money to get the NSA up and running—buying full-page newspaper ads, hiring paid canvassers and telemarketers, setting up a toll-free 800 number, and publishing newsletters and other folksy “grassroots” materials to mobilize the puffing masses.

The NSA’s stated mission was to “empower” smokers to reclaim their rights—although, behind closed doors, industry executives fretted that they didn’t want this rhetoric to go too far. They were well aware of opinion polls showing that 70 percent of all adult smokers wish they could kick the habit. “The issue of ‘empowerment of smokers’ was viewed as somewhat dangerous,” stated a tobacco strategy document. “We don’t want to ‘empower’ them to the point that they’ll quit.”

Due to the publicity associated with Burson-Marsteller’s role in setting up the NSA, Philip Morris executives felt that it was best to select some other PR firm to handle the launch of TASSC. They settled on APCO Associates, a subsidiary of the international advertising and PR firm of GCI/Grey Associates, which agreed to “organize coalition efforts to provide information with respect to the ETS issues to the media and to public officials” in exchange for a monthly retainer of \$37,500 plus expenses.

The purpose of TASSC, as described in a memo from APCO’s Tom Hockaday and Neal Cohen, was to “link the tobacco issue with other more ‘politically correct’

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products”—in other words, to make the case that efforts to regulate tobacco were based on the same “junk science” as efforts to regulate food additives, automobile emissions and other industrial products that had not yet achieved tobacco’s pariah status.

“The credibility of EPA is defeatable, but not on the basis of ETS alone,” stated a Philip Morris strategy document. “It must be part of a larger mosaic that concentrates all of the EPA’s enemies against it at one time.”

Originally dubbed the “Restoring Integrity to Science Coalition,” the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition was later renamed to resemble the venerable American Association for the Advancement of Science. After APCO’s planners realized that the resulting acronym was not terribly flattering—ASSC, or worse, the ASS Coalition—they began putting a capitalized article “the” at the beginning of the name, and TASSC was born, a “national coalition intended to educate the media, public officials and the public about the dangers of ‘junk science.’”

In September 1993, APCO President Margery Kraus sent a memo to Philip Morris Communications Director Vic Han. “We look forward to the successful launching of TASSC this fall,” she stated. “We believe the groundwork we conduct to complete the launch will enable TASSC to expand and assist Philip Morris in its efforts with issues in targeted states in 1994.”

APCO’s work would focus on expanding TASSC’s membership, finding outside money to help conceal the role of Philip Morris as its primary funder, compiling a litany of “additional examples of unsound science,” and “coordinating and directing outreach to the scientific and academic communities.”

APCO would also direct and manage former New Mexico governor Garrey Carruthers, who had been hired as TASSC’s spokesman. “This includes developing and maintaining his schedule, prioritizing his time and energies, and briefing Carruthers and other appropriate TASSC representatives,” Kraus wrote, outlining a “comprehensive media relations strategy” designed to “maximize the use of TASSC and its members into Philip Morris’s issues in targeted states. . . . This includes using TASSC as a tool in targeted legislative battles.”

Planned activities included publishing a monthly newsletter, frequent news releases, drafting “boilerplate” speeches and op-ed pieces to be used by TASSC representatives, and placing articles in various trade publications to help recruit members from the agriculture, chemical, biotechnology and food additive industries. In addition to APCO’s monthly fee, \$5,000 per month was budgeted “to compensate Garrey Carruthers.”

Considerable effort was expended to conceal the fact that TASSC was created and funded by Philip Morris. APCO recommended that TASSC first be introduced to the public through a “decentralized launch outside the large markets of Washington, DC and New York” in order to “avoid cynical reporters from major media.”

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***“Increasingly today, one can find examples of junk science that compromise the integrity of the field of science and, at the same time, create a scare environment where unnecessary regulations on industry in general, and on the consumer products industry in particular, are rammed through without respect to rhyme, reason, effect or cause.”***

**—Michael A. Miles, former CEO of the Philip Morris tobacco company  
1993 Speech to the Economic Club of Chicago**

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In smaller markets, APCO reasoned, there would be “less reviewing/challenging of TASSC messages.” Also, a decentralized launch would “limit potential for counterattack. The opponents of TASSC tend to concentrate their efforts in top markets while skipping the secondary markets. This approach sends TASSC’s message initially into these more receptive markets—and enables us to build upon early successes.”

The plan included a barnstorming media tour by Garrey Carruthers of these secondary markets. “APCO will arrange on-the-ground visits with three to four reporters in each city. These interviews, using TASSC’s trained spokespeople, third-party allies (e.g., authors of books on unsound science), members of the TASSC Science Board, and/or Governor Carruthers, will be scheduled for a one to two day media tour in each city.”

To set up the interviews, APCO used a list of sympathetic reporters provided by John Boltz, a manager of media affairs at Philip Morris. “We thought it best to remove any possible link to PM, thus Boltz is not making the calls,” noted Philip Morris public affairs director Jack Lenzi. “With regard to media inquiries to PM about TASSC, I am putting together some Q and A. We will not deny being a corporate member/sponsor, will not specify dollars, and will refer them to the TASSC ‘800-’ number, being manned by David Sheon (APCO).”

Other plans, developed later, included creation of a TASSC internet page that could be used to “broadly dis-

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tribute published studies/papers favorable to smoking/ETS debate” and “release PM authored papers . . . on ETS science and bad science/bad public policy.”

Carruthers began his media tour in December, with stopovers in cities including San Diego, Dallas and Denver. News releases sent out in advance of each stop described TASSC as a “grassroots-based, not-for-profit watchdog group of scientists and representatives from universities, independent organizations and industry, that advocates the use of sound science in the public policy arena.” As examples of unsound science, it pointed to the asbestos abatement guidelines, the “dioxin scare” in Times Beach, Missouri, and “unprecedented regulations to limit radon levels in drinking water.”

In Texas, local TASSC recruits involved in the launch included Dr. Margaret Maxey and Floy Lilley, both of the University of Texas. “The Clean Air Act is a perfect example of laboratory science being superficially applied to reality,” Lilley said. Carruthers took the opportunity to inveigh against politicized uses of science by the Environmental Protection Agency “to make science ‘fit’ with the political leanings of special interests.” EPA’s studies, he complained, “are frequently carried out without the benefit of peer review or quality assurance.”

In Denver, Carruthers told a local radio station that the public has been “shafted by shoddy science, and it has cost consumers and government a good deal of money.” When asked who was financing TASSC, Carruthers sidestepped the question. “We don’t want to be caught being a crusader for a single industry,” he said. “We’re not out here defending the chemical industry; we’re not out here defending the automobile industry, or the petroleum industry, or the tobacco industry; we’re here just to ensure that sound science is used.”

Virtually every news release made some reference to the so-called “Alar scare,” in which consumers mobilized to stop apple growers from using the pesticide Alar. The U.S. EPA has classified Alar as a “probable carcinogen,” and subsequent reports from the World Health Organization and the U.S. Public Health Service had concurred with that judgment. Pro-industry groups continue to defend the chemical, however, as does former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.

In its news releases, TASSC made a point of invoking Koop’s name whenever possible. In an “advertorial” titled “Science: A Tool, Not a Weapon,” TASSC noted that “respected experts, including then-Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, said the scientific evidence showed no likelihood of harm from Alar. . . . This is not an isolated case of bad science being used by policymakers,” it added. “It’s happened regarding asbestos, dioxin and

toxic waste. . . . It’s happening in the debate over environmental tobacco smoke, or second-hand smoke. The studies done so far on the topic do not demonstrate evidence that second-hand smoke causes cancer, even though that is the popular wisdom.”

To the casual reader, it would almost appear as if Dr. Koop were a defender of environmental tobacco smoke, rather than one of its most prominent public critics.

## EUROTASSC

In 1994, Philip Morris budgeted \$880,000 in funding for TASSC. In consultation with APCO and Burson-Marsteller, the company began planning to set up a second, European organization, tentatively named “Scientists for Sound Public Policy” (later renamed the European Science and Environment Forum). Like TASSC, the European organization would attempt to smuggle tobacco advocacy into a larger bundle of “sound science” issues, including the “ban on growth hormone for livestock; ban on [genetically-engineered bovine growth hormone] to improve milk production; pesticide restrictions; ban on indoor smoking; restrictions on use of chlorine; ban on certain pharmaceutical products; restrictions on the use of biotechnology.”

The public and policymakers needed to be “educated,” Burson-Marsteller explained, because “political decision-makers are vulnerable to activists’ emotional appeals and press campaigns. . . . The precautionary principle is now the accepted guideline. Even if a hypothesis is not 100 percent scientifically proven, action should be taken, e.g. global warming.”

Companies that B-M thought could be recruited to support the European endeavor would include makers of “consumer products (food, beverages, tobacco), packaging industry, agrichemical industry, chemical industry, pharmaceutical industry, biotech industry, electric power industry, telecommunications.”

A turf war broke out between Burson-Marsteller and APCO over the question of which PR firm should handle the European campaign. Jim Lindheim of Burson-Marsteller laid claim to the account by stressing his firm’s already-proven expertise at defending tobacco science in Europe. “We have the network, much of which is already sensitized to PM’s special needs,” he stated. “We have a lot of experience in every country working with scientists. . . . We’ve got a large client base with ‘scientific problems’ whom we can tap for sponsorship.”

APCO’s Margery Kraus responded by reminding Philip Morris regulatory affairs director Matthew Winokur that Burson-Marsteller’s long history of tobacco industry work was public knowledge and therefore might taint the endeavor.

“Given the sensitivities of other TASSC activities and a previous decision not to have TASSC work directly with Burson, due to these sensitivities in other TASSC work, I did not feel comfortable having Steig or anyone else from Burson assume primary responsibility for working with TASSC scientists,” Kraus stated. As for experience handling “scientific problems,” she pointed to her parent company’s work for “the following industries impacted by science and environmental policy decisions: chemical, pharmaceutical, nuclear, waste management and motor industries, power generation, biotech products, packaging and detergents, and paint. They have advised clients on a number of issues, including: agricultural manufacturing, animal testing, chlorine, dioxins, toxic waste, ozone/CFCs, power generation, coastal pollution, lead in gasoline, polyurethanes, lubricants.”

TASSC was designed to appear outwardly like a broad coalition of scientists from multiple disciplines. The other industries and interests—biotech, chemical, toxic waste, coastal pollution, lubricants—served as protective camouflage, concealing the tobacco money that was at the heart of the endeavor. TASSC signed up support from corporate executives at Santa Fe Pacific Gold Corporation, Procter & Gamble, the Louisiana Chemical Association, the National Pest Control Association, General Motors, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Exxon, W.R. Grace & Co., Amoco, Occidental Petroleum, 3M, Chevron and Dow Chemical.

Many of its numerous news releases attacking “junk science” made no mention of tobacco whatsoever. It objected to government guidelines for asbestos abatement; said the “dioxin scare” in Times Beach, Missouri was a tempest in a teapot; scoffed at the need for an EPA Superfund cleanup in Aspen, Colorado; dismissed reports of health effects related to use of the Norplant contraceptive; denounced the Clean Water Act; and orchestrated a letter-writing campaign to oppose any government action aimed at limiting industrial activities linked to global warming.

### TRASH TALK WITH THE JUNKMAN

In February 1994, APCO vice president Neal Cohen made the mistake of boasting candidly about some of the sneaky tactics his company uses to set up front groups. His remarks were made at a conference of the Public Affairs Council (PAC), an exclusive association of top-ranking lobbyists and PR people. *New York Times* political reporter Jane Fritsch later used his remarks as the basis for a March 1996 article titled “Sometimes Lobbyists Strive to Keep Public in the Dark.”

Shortly after APCO suffered this embarrassment, the responsibility for managing TASSC was quietly trans-

ferred to the EOP Group, a well-connected, Washington-based lobby firm whose clients have included the American Crop Protection Association (the chief trade association of the pesticide industry), the American Petroleum Institute, AT&T, the Business Roundtable, the Chlorine Chemistry Council, Dow Chemical Company, Edison Electric Institute (nuclear power), Fort Howard Corp. (a paper manufacturer), International Food Additives Council, Monsanto Co., National Mining Association, and the Nuclear Energy Institute.

In March 1997, EOP lobbyist Steven Milloy, described in a TASSC news release as “a nationally known expert and author on environmental risk and regulatory policy issues,” became TASSC’s executive director. “Steven brings not only a deep and strong academic and professional background to TASSC, but he brings an equally deep, strong and passionate commitment to the principle of using sound science in making public policy decisions,” said Garrey Carruthers. “The issue of junk science has become the topic of network news specials, major articles in newspapers, and a key topic in Congress and legislatures around the country. I look forward to working with Steven to continue to drive home the need for sound science in public policy making.”

Although the news release referred to Milloy’s work “over the last six years” on “environmental and regulatory policy issues,” it did not mention that he had worked specifically for the tobacco industry.

During 1992 Milloy worked for James Tozzi at Multinational Business Services. Tozzi, a former career bureaucrat at the U.S. Office of Management and Budget who had spearheaded the Reagan-era OMB campaign to gut environmental regulations, is described in internal Philip Morris documents as the company’s “primary contact on the EPA/ETS risk assessment during the second half of 1992.” During that period, it noted, “Tozzi has been invaluable in executing our Washington efforts including generating technical briefing papers, numerous letters to agencies and media interviews,” a service for which Philip Morris paid an estimated \$300,000 in consulting fees.

Philip Morris also paid Tozzi’s company another \$880,000 to establish a “nonprofit” think-tank called the Institute for Regulatory Policy (IRP). On behalf of Philip Morris, the IRP put together “three different coalitions which support sound science—Coalition for Executive Order, Coalition for Moratorium on Risk Assessments, and Coalition of Cities and States on Environmental Mandates. . . . IRP could work with us as well as APCO in a coordinated manner,” PM’s Boland and Borelli had noted in February 1993.



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After leaving Tozzi's service, Milloy became president of his own organization called the "Regulatory Impact Analysis Project, Inc.," where he wrote a couple of reports arguing that "most environmental risks are so small or indistinguishable that their existence cannot be proven." Shortly thereafter, he launched the "Junk Science Home Page" ([www.junkscience.com](http://www.junkscience.com)). Calling himself "the Junkman," he offered daily attacks on environmentalists, public health and food safety regulators, anti-nuclear and animal rights activists, and a wide range of other targets that he accused of using unsound science to advance various political agendas.

Milloy was also active in defense of the tobacco industry, particularly in regard to the issue of environmental tobacco smoke. He dismissed the EPA's 1993 report linking secondhand smoke to cancer as "a joke," and when the *British Medical Journal* published its own study with similar results in 1997, he scoffed that "it remains a joke today." After one researcher published a study linking secondhand smoke to cancer, Milloy wrote that she "must have pictures of journal editors in compromising positions with farm animals. How else can you explain her studies seeing the light of day?"

In August 1997, the *New York Times* reported that Milloy was one of the paid speakers at a Miami briefing for foreign reporters sponsored by the British-American Tobacco Company, whose Brown & Williamson unit makes popular cigarettes like Kool, Carlton and Lucky Strike. At the briefing, which was off-limits to U.S. journalists, the company flew in dozens of reporters from countries including Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Peru and paid for their hotel rooms and expensive meals while the reporters sat through presentations that ridiculed "lawsuit-driven societies like the United States" for using "unsound science" to raise questions about "infinitesimal, if not hypothetical, risks" related to inhaling a "whiff" of tobacco smoke.

## THE LEGACY

In 1999, University of Pennsylvania professor Edward S. Herman surveyed 258 articles in mainstream newspapers that used the term "junk science" during the years 1996 through 1998. Only 8 percent of the articles used the term in reference to corporate-manipulated science. By contrast, 62 percent used the term "junk science" in reference to scientific arguments used by environmentalists, other corporate critics, or personal-injury lawyers engaged in suing corporations.

"What's starting to happen is that this term, 'junk science,' is being thrown around all the time," says Lucinda Finley, a law professor from the State University of New York at Buffalo who specializes in product

liability and women's health. "People are calling scientists who disagree with them purveyors of 'junk.' But what we're really talking about is a very normal process of scientific disagreement and give-and-take. Calling someone a 'junk scientist' is just a way of shutting them up."

Like other corporate-funded front groups, the organizations that flack for sound science are sometimes fly-by-night organizations. Called into existence for a particular cause or legislative lobby campaign, they often dry up and blow away once the campaign is over. The tendency of groups to appear and disappear creates another form of camouflage, making it difficult for journalists and everyday citizens to sort out the bewildering proliferation of names and acronyms.

This was indeed what happened with The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, which was quietly retired in late 1998. Its legacy, however, continues. Dozens, if not hundreds, of industry-funded organizations and conservative think tanks continue to wave the sound science banner. Milloy's Junk Science Home Page remains active, claiming sponsorship from "Citizens for the Integrity of Science," about which no further information is publicly available.

The tone of the Junk Science Home Page appears calculated to lower rather than elevate scientific discourse. That tone is particularly notable in its extended attack on *Our Stolen Future*, the book about endocrine-disrupting chemicals by Theo Colborn, Dianne Dumanoski and Peter Myers. Milloy's on-line parody, titled "Our Swollen Future," includes a cartoon depiction of Colborn hauling a wheelbarrow of money to the bank (her implied motive for writing the book), and refers to Dianne Dumanoski as "Dianne Dumb-as-an-oxski."

Casual visitors to Milloy's Junk Science Home Page might be tempted to dismiss him as merely an obnoxious adolescent with a website. They would be surprised to discover that he is a well-connected fixture in conservative Washington policy circles. He currently holds the title of "adjunct scholar" at the libertarian Cato Institute, which was rated the fourth most influential think tank in Washington, DC in a 1999 survey of congressional staffers and journalists.

Milloy is also highly visible on the internet. In addition to publishing the Junk Science Home Page ([www.junkscience.com](http://www.junkscience.com)) and a website for the No More Scares campaign ([www.nomore scares.com](http://www.nomore scares.com)), Milloy also operates a third website ([www.consumerdistorts.com](http://www.consumerdistorts.com)). The "Consumer Distorts" website is devoted to attacking Consumers Union, the publisher of *Consumer Reports* magazine, which Milloy accuses of socialism, sensationalism, and "scaring consumers away from products." ■

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# TOBACCO'S SECONDHAND SCIENCE OF SMOKE-FILLED ROOMS

by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

Organizations such as the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association and the American Cancer Society estimate that direct smoking kills about 400,000 people per year in the United States—or, if you use the World Health Organization's estimate, about 3 million people per year worldwide.

Philip Morris would not retreat from its decades-long denial that direct smoking causes cancer until the year 1999. Privately, however, its attorneys and PR advisors were already planning a strategic retreat from this position as early as the 1970s. In its place, they set out to build a scientific case against the mounting body of evidence showing that *nonsmokers* also suffer adverse health effects from secondhand smoke inhaled in bars, restaurants and other public places.

Secondhand smoke appears under a variety of names in the industry's internal documents, which refer to it variously as "indirect smoke," "passive smoke," "side-stream smoke" or "environmental tobacco smoke" (often abbreviated ETS).

Industry executives realized early on that the issue of tobacco's indirect effects posed a potentially greater threat to profits than the issue of its direct effects on smokers themselves. Once the public realized that cigarettes were also killing *nonsmokers*, anti-tobacco activists would press forward with increasing success in their campaigns to ban smoking in public places.

"If smokers can't smoke on the way to work, at work, in stores, banks, restaurants, malls, and other public places, they are going to smoke less," complained Philip Morris political affairs director Ellen Merlo in a speech to tobacco vendors. "A large percentage of them are going to quit. In short, cigarette purchases will be drastically reduced and volume declines will accelerate." A 1993 Philip Morris budget presentation complained that "smoking restrictions have been estimated, this year alone, to have decreased PM profits by \$40 million."

The industry's campaign to cultivate pro-industry scientists on the secondhand smoke issue was massive, multi-faceted and international. Some scientists were positioned as public voices in defense of tobacco. Others played behind-the-scenes roles, quietly cultivating allies or monitoring meetings and feeding back reports to the tobacco industry's legal and political strategists. A 1990 memorandum by Covington & Burling, one of the main law firms representing Philip Morris, reported on efforts by industry consultants in Lisbon, Hanover, Budapest, Milan, Scotland, Copenhagen, Switzerland, Norway, Australia, Finland and Asia

"Our European consultants have organized and will conduct a major scientific conference in Lisbon next

month on indoor air quality in warm climates," it stated. "More than 100 scientists from throughout the world will attend.... The focus of the conference will not be tobacco; rather, the point of the conference is to show the insignificance of ETS by emphasizing the genuine problems of air quality in warm climates. Some degree of 'balance' in the presentation of the issues is of course necessary to achieve persuasiveness, but the overall results will be positive and important. . . . We ask our consultants to cover all substantial scientific conferences where they can usefully influence scientific and public opinion."

In addition to scientific conferences, consultants were at work giving media briefings; trying to sway airline flight attendants in favor of in-flight smoking; producing and appearing in videos and op-ed pieces; and testifying in court proceedings regarding allegations of fraud in tobacco advertisements.

"Our consultants have created the world's only learned scientific society addressing questions of indoor air quality," the report boasted. "It will soon have its own periodic newsletter, in which ETS and other [indoor air quality] issues will be discussed in a balanced fashion to an audience of regulators, scientists, building operators, etc. It will also have its own scientific journal, published by a major European publishing house, in which [indoor air quality] issues will again be addressed."

Other consultants were writing books, one on environmental tobacco smoke and health, another "exposing the vagaries of medical truisms, including those relating to tobacco" as "a clever and entertaining way of suggesting that medical 'certainties' are frequently without genuine scientific basis." Another hired expert had published a scientific paper showing that keeping pet birds was a bigger cancer risk than secondhand smoke. Yet another was an editor at the *Lancet* and "is continuing to publish numerous reviews, editorials and comments on ETS and other issues."

## STRAINING AT GNATS, SWALLOWING CAMELS

In 1986, U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop released an analysis concluding that secondhand smoke was a significant health threat to nonsmokers, and a host of other studies by prominent health organizations have reached similar conclusions. The most common and serious effects are asthma, emphysema, and heart disease.

Estimates of the number of ETS-related deaths from heart disease alone have ranged from 37,000 to 62,000 per year. Children's lungs are still developing, and they are therefore considered especially sensitive to environmental tobacco smoke. According to one estimate by the state of California, ETS causes 2,700 cases per year of sudden infant death syndrome in the United States.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's risk assessment of environmental tobacco smoke was published in 1993. It estimated that secondhand smoke causes some 150,000 to 300,000 cases per year of lower respiratory tract infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia in children up to 18 months of age, resulting in 7,500 to 15,000 hospitalizations, plus somewhere between 400,000 and a million cases of asthma.

The EPA also decided, for the first time, that secondhand smoke should be labeled a "Class A carcinogen"—a government term which means that ETS is not merely suspected but *known* to cause lung cancer. The impact of secondhand smoke is small compared to the effect of direct smoking, but EPA estimated that some 3,000 lung cancer deaths per year among U.S. nonsmokers should be attributed to secondhand cigarette smoke.

Tobacco's defenders realized that challenging the entire body of evidence in EPA's risk assessment would be impossible. Its conclusion that secondhand smoke causes respiratory effects in children was widely shared and virtually undisputed, so industry's response to that part of the risk assessment was simply to ignore it.

EPA's conclusion regarding the link between secondhand smoke and cancer was based on several different types of evidence, most of which are hard to dispute:

- (1) Secondhand smoke contains essentially all of the same cancer-causing and toxic agents that people inhale when they smoke directly.
- (2) Tests of humans exposed to secondhand smoke show that their bodies absorb and metabolize significant amounts of these toxins.
- (3) Exposure to secondhand smoke has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory test animals, which suggests strongly that it does the same thing to humans.
- (4) EPA reviewed analyses of some 30 epidemiological studies from eight different countries and found that women who never smoked themselves but were exposed to their husband's smoke have a higher rate of lung cancer than women married to nonsmokers.

Taken together, these pieces of evidence make it difficult to avoid the conclusion that secondhand smoke causes lung cancer. However, EPA's estimate of the *number* of deaths was based solely on epidemiology, a branch of medical science that uses statistical analysis to study the distribution of disease in human populations.

Epidemiology uses statistical correlations to draw conclusions about what causes disease, but it is a notoriously inexact science. In order to estimate someone's lifetime exposure to secondhand smoke, researchers

must rely on that person's memories from years past, which may not be entirely accurate. Moreover, surveys cannot take into account all of the possible confounding factors that may bias a study's outcome. Were the people surveyed exposed to other lung carcinogens, such as asbestos or radon? Did they inhale more secondhand smoke than they remember, or maybe less?

Owing to these uncertainties, the EPA's estimate of 3,000 deaths per year from ETS-related cancer is only a rough guess. It may be too high, or it may be too low. The tobacco industry's propagandists seized on this sliver of uncertainty like a starving dog lunging for a meatball.

There is no particular logical reason, from a scientific or policy perspective, why anyone should focus on lung cancer. After all, it represents only a fraction of the total number of deaths attributed to secondhand smoke, and there is no particular reason to prefer death from emphysema or heart disease over death from lung cancer. The lung cancer estimate, however, was the part of the EPA risk assessment that was most open to debate on methodological grounds. By focusing on it, the tobacco industry hoped to distract attention from the report's irrefutable broader conclusions.

## A NOT-SO-INDEPENDENT EXPERT

Professor Gary Huber was one of the industry-funded scientists who responded to the call. Huber had built a career for himself as one of the contrarian scientists who regularly disputed the growing body of scientific evidence about tobacco's deadly effects. Over the years, he received more than \$7 million in tobacco industry research funding, and although his reputation as a "tobacco whore" cost him the respect of friends and colleagues, in industry circles he was something of a star, hobnobbing with top executives, fishing with senior attorneys and participating in legal strategy sessions.

Huber worked first at Harvard until the university took away his laboratory. A stint at the University of Kentucky's pro-industry tobacco and health research institute ended when he was fired for alleged mismanagement, but he always managed to land on his feet, thanks to the tobacco money that followed him wherever he went.

After Kentucky, he landed at the University of Texas, where he ran a nutritional health center while simultaneously offering secret consulting services to Shook, Hardy and Bacon, a national law firm that represented both Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds. During his time in Texas, industry lawyers paid him \$1.7 million to collect and critique published scientific studies linking smoking to emphysema, asthma and bronchitis. The tobacco attorneys went to extraordinary lengths to keep

## READERS INVITED TO TRUST US, WE'RE EXPERTS

PR Watch editors Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber have completed a new book, titled *Trust Us, We're Experts: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles with Your Future*.

An exposé of the PR techniques used to manufacture “independent experts,” *Trust Us, We're Experts* will be published by Tarcher/Putnam and will be available in bookstores in January.

PR relies heavily on what industry insiders call the “third party technique” of “putting your client’s words in someone else’s mouth.” *Trust Us, We're Experts* shows that many of these so-called “independent third parties” are often anything but neutral. They are hand-picked, cultivated, and packaged to make you believe what they have to say—preferably in an “objective” format like a news show. And in some cases, they have been paid handsomely for their “opinions.”

Topics covered include: the manipulations of science with respect to occupational health issues; the influence of corporate funding on medical research; and case studies involving specific issues such as biotechnology and global warming.

Journalist and author Bill Moyers says *Trust Us, We're Experts* explains “how the world wags, and who’s wagging it. . . . Read, get mad, roll up your sleeves, and fight back. Rampton and Stauber have issued a wake-up call we can’t ignore.”

Tufts University Professor Sheldon Krinsky says the book “explodes the cult of expertise and shows how easily the media and their readers can be misled by public relations claims masquerading as science. This book makes the best case I know for complete disclosure of the financial conflicts of interest of scientists and the corporate influence on university research.”



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its payments to Huber a secret, routing the money through an outside account that bore a Greek code name to keep it off hospital books and make it difficult for an outsider to find.

The purpose of the secrecy, of course, was to preserve a veneer of third-party independence so that Huber could appear credible when he spoke out publicly in defense of cigarettes. By the late 1980s, he had become one of the most vocal and visible scientific critics of studies probing the hazards of environmental tobacco smoke.

In 1991 Huber authored an article that picked away at EPA’s epidemiology for *Consumers Research* magazine, a *Consumer Reports* lookalike that is partially funded by the tobacco industry. The scientific studies linking secondhand smoke to cancer, he wrote, were “shoddy and poorly conceived.” His article was repeatedly quoted by the tobacco industry’s network of columnists and by opinion magazines opposed to government regulation of smoking.

Michael Fumento (a graduate of the partly tobacco-funded National Journalism Center) wrote a piece for *Investor’s Business Daily* that quoted Huber and several

other tobacco-friendly researchers, calling them “scientists and policy analysts who say they couldn’t care less about tobacco company profits” but “say the data the EPA cites do not bear out its conclusions.”

Huber’s arguments were also cited by Jacob Sullum, editor of the libertarian magazine *Reason* (which receives funding from Philip Morris), in an article that was then picked up by *Forbes Media Critic* magazine. Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds liked the Sullum piece so much that in May 1994 the R.J. Reynolds company bought reprint rights to an editorial he had written for the *Wall Street Journal*. A few months later, Philip Morris paid Sullum \$5,000 for the right to reprint one of his articles as a five-day series of full-page ads in newspapers throughout the country, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Miami Herald*, *Boston Globe*, and *Baltimore Sun*. The ads appeared under the headline, “If We Said It, You Might Not Believe It.”

Thanks to these and many other recyclings of Huber’s message, the tobacco industry’s attempt to discredit the EPA report has been seen by millions more people than ever read the original report itself. ■