

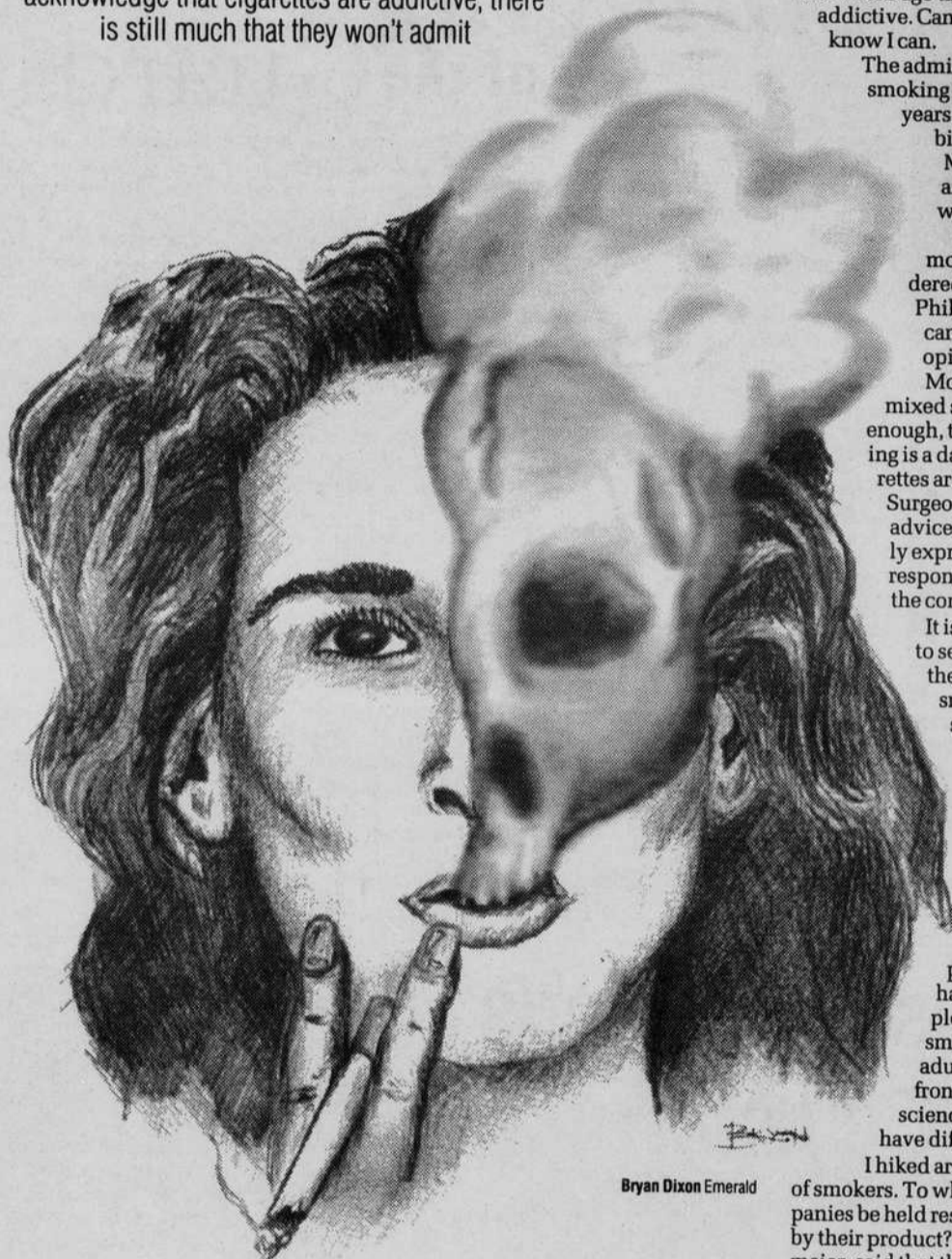
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CLEARING THE AIR

Even as tobacco companies begin to acknowledge that cigarettes are addictive, there is still much that they won't admit



Bryan Dixon Emerald

**Jonathan
Gruber**

Puff, puff. Wheeze, wheeze. Oh whadda deceit it is. Philip Morris, the company that last year manufactured one out every six cigarettes sold worldwide, finally acknowledged two weeks ago that cigarettes are dangerous and addictive. Can you sleep easier? Heck yeah, I know I can.

The admission now, when the dangers of smoking have been documented for 30 years, is insulting. It insults me as a biology major and as a pre-med. More importantly, it insults me as someone who has any contact with reality.

But to get a bigger picture of modern smoking issues, I wandered about two places: first, the Philip Morris Web site, and second, campus, looking for some smokers' opinions.

Morris' Web site is a cornucopia of mixed signals about smoking. True enough, there are admissions that smoking is a dangerous habit and that cigarettes are addictive. There are links to Surgeon General's reports and health advice. The site, however, also strongly expresses views on the company's responsibility for smokers' health and the concept of "adult choice."

It is fine that the company wishes to sell to adults. Goood Freedom! If these companies only want adult smokers, however, it must be something new. The Surgeon General reported in a 1994 report that 90 percent of all smokers started by age 19.

Tobacco companies believe strongly in "adult choice" because, in the face of extreme governmental and legal pressure, it is the only position that has substantive philosophical support. I would hardly call it a matter of principle, when more than half of all smokers started before age 14. If adult choice had been at the forefront of tobacco companies' consciences in recent decades, we might have different results by now.

I hiked around campus to get the opinion of smokers. To what degree should tobacco companies be held responsible for the hazards posed by their product? Carey Risch, a senior biology major, said that the companies' responsibility

should be "zero. We all know it. We're taught it in third grade."

I have to agree that we all know about smoking being dangerous. Nicotine is addictive; smoke contains carcinogens. As citizens, we can do only one thing with this information: choose whether or not to smoke.

Tobacco companies had more options. Theoretically speaking, they could have manipulated their cigarettes to make them more addictive and thus more profitable.

Should we depart from the moral high ground? As if the fact that tobacco companies were in denial so long releases them from responsibilities of listening to science. If we allow them any credit for "realizing" those facts now, then there's no way that they could be proven to be intentionally endangering the public. Any formula changes to their cigarettes could be nothing but coincidence unless the public takes a stand that cigarette companies ignored their obligation to be as familiar with their own products as possible.

It seems to me that the tobacco controversy needs a strong dose of reality. There's a few suspicious things that no company really has acknowledged but that we all know anyway.

Someone needs to clear the air.

So to speak.

Cigarettes are addictive. Cigarettes are dangerous to smokers. Second-hand smoke is dangerous to non-smokers. As a result, smokers are generally restricted from smoking in places where nons have to be. Tobacco companies sell a dangerous product — which is theoretically OK. But they have not been willing to accommodate the restrictions that makers of other dangerous products live with.

New smokers are generally kid smokers. Regardless of whether or not certain ad campaigns are directed at children, they work on children. When children are hooked on cigarettes, it harms adult choice. If you are addicted to smoking on your 18th birthday, you never really had an adult choice, did you?

What about those commercials telling kids to make their own decisions and not smoke? (Kid choice?) Hanso Kang, a junior biochemistry major who is also a smoker, said, "It seems weird because they are a cigarette company and they're telling people to not smoke."

Weird, indeed. I think that every time those companies make a "don't smoke" ad that has their name at the back end, it takes away from the efficacy of the message.

According to many analysts, tobacco companies are becoming more honest in an attempt to reduce their liability in lawsuits. While each suit must obviously be judged on its own merit, the smokescreen will not work. OK, so they accept reality. No one should believe that the last three decades were filled with honest mistakes.

Jonathan Gruber is a columnist for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached via e-mail jgruber@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

Letters to the editor

Help inform students

The ASUO and the Office of Student Life have been working in conjunction to better inform students and the community about current events. Students and administrators will be distributing packets of information in order to educate the general student population and the West University community about upcoming programs and events during Homecoming/Halloween weekend. Included in the packets will be a calendar of events, tips on throwing a safe party, as well as students' basic legal rights.

If you would like to join other students and staff in the distribution of these materials either contact Marian Fowler at asuocod@gladstone.uoregon.edu and/or come to 189 PLC at 5:30 p.m. today. The event should last until approximately 7:30 p.m. Pizza and refreshments will be provided for those who participate.

Ty Prichard
Senior

Marian Fowler
ASUO Community Outreach Director

Column disappointing

I was disappointed with the recent ODE column (ODE, Oct. 14) that advocated the mandatory use of student fees to foster free speech. I strongly support our right to fully ex-

ercise free speech and to participate in our communities marketplace of ideas. Yet, the current mandatory use of student fees to fund the marketplace of ideas is not really free speech at all. Instead, it artificially bolsters speech at the expense of our wallets and quite possibly our consciences.

The Wisconsin students who are challenging the use of their student fees in the U.S. Supreme Court object to funding groups that actively work against their beliefs. For them, free speech comes at a steep cost: They must surrender their values and convictions. Their mandatory contribution to free speech is working against them.

This does not need to be so. Students should be allowed to opt out of funding particular student groups that they feel do not represent their voice. As a result, student groups will truly speak for those who support their ideas. Groups with important ideas and activities will continue to contribute to the marketplace of ideas. They will be lean, mean and free to impact our community with speech that is truly free.

Jason Spies
History

Protect your paychecks

The best con artists I know are my own children and my elected representatives. When my children were unemployed teenagers they never came to me and asked for money to buy cigarettes. They always had some story about

needing extra money for lunch or for a friend's birthday gift.

Our city councilors and county commissioners know that if they proposed a ballot measure that would provide health insurance benefits for the unmarried heterosexual partners of city and county employees at a cost of almost \$400 per month per employee it would have snowball's chance in hell of passing. It sounds much better if they tell us that they want \$22 million for law enforcement so that they can provide us with safer neighborhoods.

The Tanner court case that ordered state and local governments to provide health benefits to homosexual couples specifically excluded unmarried heterosexual couples from its definition of "domestic partners" because they are "free to marry." Both our city councilors and county commissioners have betrayed the public trust by pretending that they have the unlimited authority to require taxpayers to provide health insurance benefits to whomever they choose to define as a "domestic partner."

Vote no on Measure 20-25 and protect your paychecks and pocketbooks from the politicians in city hall and the county building. Every dime wasted by our elected officials in an effort to curry favor with our public employees and their unions is a dime that would be better spent by those who actually earned it.

Nicholas J. Urhausen
Eugene citizen