Smoke screen

Passive smoking at work kills three workers in Britain every day, according to a new report. Medical experts, unions, public health specialists and workers want this deadly hazard outlawed. The tobacco and hospitality industries do not. Guess who the government is listening to? **Rory O'Neill** reports.

Every year 1,200 people in the UK – three a day – die due to passive smoking at work, according to new research by second hand smoke expert James Repace.

A killer on the loose reveals that in the UK around 900 office workers, 165 bar workers and 145 manufacturing workers die each year as a direct result of breathing in other people's tobacco smoke at work.

The figures show that there are three times as many deaths a year from passive smoking at work as from workplace injuries. ASH research suggests three million people in the UK are exposed to second hand smoke while at work.

James Repace said: "This study shows that previous research has seriously underestimated the number of people killed by second-hand smoke at work."

The TUC, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), who teamed up for a 9 April "Don't choke on the smoke" conference, say the research demonstrates the need for a legally binding Code of Practice for workplace smoking, proposed over two years ago by the Health and Safety Commission.

Amanda Sandford of the anti-tobacco campaigning group ASH said: "One death caused by passive smoking is unacceptable but more than 1,000 a year is a disgrace and for every day's delay the government has deaths on its conscience."

Why won't they act?

ASH has accused the government of being more concerned with keeping the tobacco and hospitality industries happy than it is with keeping the workforce healthy.

In March, ASH charged the government with suppressing a study that concluded thousands of lives and millions in business and health care costs could be saved each year by outlawing smoking at work.

The unpublished HSC study says up to 2,340 lives a year could be saved by banning workplace smoking. The total savings to government and business, including the National Health Service, could be £21 billion, the study says.

ASH says the government is "putting the inflated concerns of the hospitality trade and small businesses ahead of the very real health impact of passive smoking."

Internal industry documents show that tobacco manufacturers have deliberately conspired to prevent bars and restaurants from becoming smoke-free zones.

Researchers writing in the June 2002 issue of the medical journal *Tobacco Control* say the evidence that profits would be hit was a tobacco industry smoke screen and the industry had in fact conned the hospitality trade, which the industry says "is our greatest potential ally," into doing its dirty work.
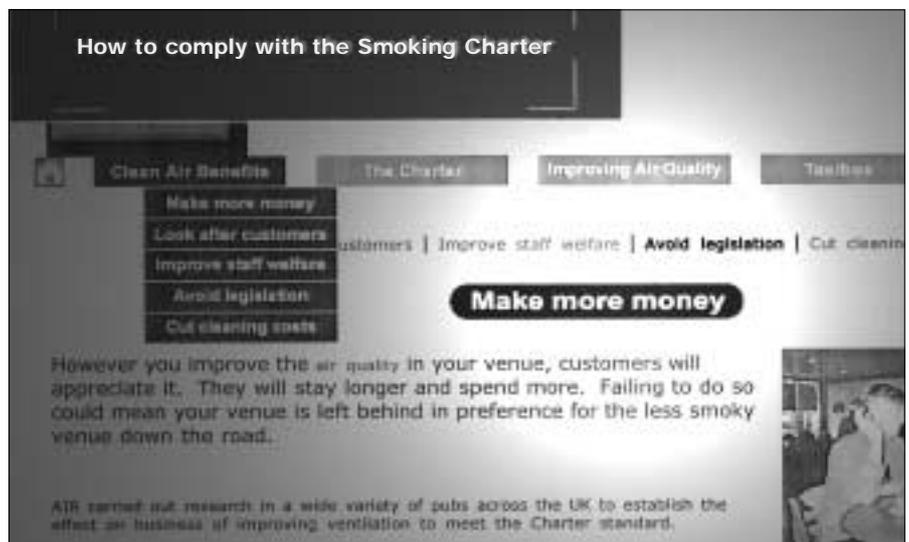
Making a packet

The authors say tobacco manufacturers gave donations to hospitality groups as part of an "aggressive and effective worldwide campaign to recruit hospitality associations" in the USA and Europe – including groups dedicated to lobbying the European Commission. Where these associations didn't exist, it created its own front organisations.

This strategy went beyond hospitality organisations. The paper points out "a programme in the UK titled, 'The Atmosphere Improves Results (AIR)' initiative, launched in 1997, received funding from the national tobacco manufacturers association."

London-based AIR is still active today. One non-operational page on its website www.airinitiative.com (below) is the "who's signing up?" page.

AIR's "avoid legislation"

How to comply with the Smoking Charter

Clean Air Benefits | The Charter | Improving Air Quality | Toolbox

Make more money
Look after customers
Improve staff welfare
Avoid legislation
Cut cleaning costs

customers | Improve staff welfare | **Avoid legislation** | Cut cleaning

Make more money

However you improve the air quality in your venue, customers will appreciate it. They will stay longer and spend more. Failing to do so could mean your venue is left behind in preference for the less smoky venue down the road.

AIR carried out research in a wide variety of pubs across the UK to establish the effect on business of improving ventilation to meet the Charter standard.

webpage, however, is fully operational and says: "In other parts of the world where tough legislation has been imposed the hospitality industry has been hit hard. Restaurants, bars and pubs have experienced falling turnover and have had to make staff cuts. Some have even been forced to close."

The *Tobacco Control* paper concludes: "Through the myth of lost profits, the tobacco industry has fooled the hospitality industry into embracing expensive ventilation equipment, while in reality 100 per cent smoke-free laws have been shown to have no effect on business revenues, or even to improve them."

The smoking gun

A new study in *Tobacco Control*, published in March 2003, has confirmed the positive impact of smoking bans on hospitality venues.

An analysis of 97 studies in eight countries on the impact of smoking bans on the hospitality industry showed that the most rigorous and independent studies found no negative impact on business.

Researchers found that those studies that concluded smoking bans were bad for business were poor quality. They were four times as likely to use subjective rather than objective measures to estimate the impact and 20 times less likely to be peer reviewed.

All the studies that concluded smoking bans had a negative impact were funded by sources that were in some way related to the tobacco industry.

Of the 21 quality studies, none reported a negative impact on business, and four reported that bans had a positive effect.

The US experience suggests the tobacco industry is playing for time – once bans are implemented, hospitality employers quickly come to appreciate them. And their customers like them too.

The April 2003 edition of the *American Journal of Public Health* reports a study in California, which has had workplace no smoking rules for eight years, which found most bar-goers said they supported and complied with a similar law two years after it went into effect. While 60 per cent approved of the law three months after it went into effect, that number reached 73 per cent about 2.5 years after the law was in place.

Brendan Barber, who steps up from the post of deputy to general secretary of the TUC in June, said: "Ministers should stop defending the fug-filled snugs of Britain's pubs, which are proving fatal for bar staff and putting off possible customers.

"The Code of Practice is sensible and pragmatic, and it's backed by unions and employers. It will protect the rights of non-smokers and smokers alike, and will end the uncertainty about where employers stand."

CIEH president Brian Hanna, who represents the health inspectors who would enforce the code in service sector workplaces – such as offices, hotels, pubs and clubs – said inspectors "need the government to provide them with the right tools to do the job. Relying on weak voluntary arrangements will simply not have the desired effect."

A killer on the loose, the ASH investigation into the threat of passive smoking to the UK workforce, April 2003. www.ash.org.uk/html/workplace/pdfs/killer.pdf

Passive smoking at work: The global pressure mounts, Rory O'Neill and Owen Tudor, TUC, April 2003. www.tuc.org.uk/risks

S Glantz and others. *Tobacco industry manipulation of the hospitality industry to maintain smoking in public places,* Tobacco Control, vol.11. pages 94-104, June 2002. www.tobaccocontrol.com

M Scollo, A Lal, A Hyland, S Glantz. *Review of the quality of studies on the economic effects of smoke-free policies on the hospitality industry,* Tobacco Control, vol.12, pages 13-20, March 2003.

Hao Tang and others. *Changes of attitudes and patronage behaviors in response to a smoke-free bar law,* American Journal of Public Health, vol.93, pages 611-617, 2003.

Union resources

Europe: SmokeAtWork – pan-European project on passive smoking at work (see right). www.smokeatwork.org

Australia: SmokeFree '03 – alliance of employee and health groups aiming to make all Australian workplaces safe and clean (smoke-free) by the end of 2003. www.ashaust.org.au/SF'03

USA: Organized Labor and Tobacco Control Network – network of trade union and tobacco control movements, c/o Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, 44 Binney Street, Boston MA 02115, USA. www.hazards.org/smoking/oltcn.htm

Europe's unions fight the fug

The TUC is co-ordinating a Europe-wide project that aims to protect workers from passive smoking, explains SmokeAtWork co-ordinator **Debbie Sanders**.

The SmokeAtWork project is focused primarily on the workers most at risk from second hand smoke – those working in pubs, clubs and restaurants.

The aim is to develop practical tools for union representatives – such as a website and training materials – to help them to negotiate smoking policies at work.

Union representatives from the UK, Sweden, Portugal, Ireland, Denmark and Romania are working on the project.

Each of these countries deals with smoking at work very differently. In Ireland, all workplaces will be smoke-free from 1 January 2004 – including pubs and restaurants.

Sweden has already banned smoking at work. Others have more to do.

The website, smokeatwork.org, will include information, collective agreements, best practice case studies and negotiating guidance.

TUC will host a conference later this year to mark the end of the passive smoking project.

If you have any smoking policies please send them to Debbie Sanders, c/o Owen Tudor, TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS or email to otudor@tuc.org.uk

The TUC's two-day SmokeAtWork pilot courses are being held in: Dundee (2 and 9 June), Exeter and Solihull (both 30 June and 7 July), Liverpool (4 and 11 July), Putney (7 and 14 July), Sheffield (11 and 18 July) and Newcastle-on-Tyne (18 and 25 July). Contact your local trade union college for details or on the web at www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s

www.smokeatwork.org

SmokeatWork
Protecting workers from passive smoking