

## Tobacco Companies Look to 'Snus' for Profits

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For decades the tobacco industry acted unethically in selling cigarettes. It shamefully dismissed scientific evidence linking cigarette smoking to cancer, heart disease and other serious illnesses.

The industry refused to admit the addictiveness of nicotine in cigarettes. Big tobacco's seven CEOs brazenly testified during a Congressional hearing that nicotine is not addictive, even as their companies added ammonia to cigarettes to boost nicotine's effect.

The tobacco industry also denied encouraging underage smoking even as tobacco companies tracked the trend in underage smokers. The industry cynically used clever advertising, including cartoon characters such as Camel's popular "Joe Cool", to attract young smokers.

The U.S. government eventually stopped tobacco companies from advertising on television and radio.

In 1998, the five largest tobacco companies entered a settlement agreement with the attorneys general of 46 states. The Agreement stopped tobacco companies from using cartoon characters in advertising, direct mail advertising, advertising on billboards, and giving away cigarette samples.

### Lead up to 'snus' sales

Government advertising limits and greater public awareness of tobacco's harms reduced cigarette smoking in the U.S. by 40 percent in two decades.

To makeup for lost cigarette profits the tobacco industry put more effort into selling the smokeless tobacco products chewing tobacco and snuff.

But smokeless tobacco suffers from a "yuck" factor. Chewing tobacco and snuff create smelly, gooey brown residues that users must spit, which repulses many people.

Also, scientific studies link smokeless tobacco to oral cancers, facial bone cancers, and possibly pancreatic cancer.

The U.S. tobacco industry now looks to a different smokeless tobacco to boost profits and shows a willingness to repeat its past unethical conduct.

"Snus" is a product developed in Sweden. It is a teabag-like pouch filled with tobacco a user places between the upper lip and gum. Unlike other smokeless tobacco snus needs no spitting of a residue. Users simply remove and discreetly discard the pouches.

Advocates say snus is socially acceptable because nonsmokers cannot detect its use. It is a convenient way to get a nicotine-high without antagonizing nonsmokers.

The tobacco industry claims snus contains lower nicotine levels than other smokeless tobaccos or cigarettes.

But any product containing nicotine is addictive and some tobacco companies offer snus with a high-nicotine content.

The industry also argues snus use is safe. While it is true that snus pouches contain less harmful ingredients and carcinogens than cigarettes or other smokeless tobaccos, no tobacco product is safe.

Snus is cheaper than other tobacco products. Combining low cost and ease of use makes it possible for snus users to get exposure to the same levels of nicotine and carcinogens as cigarette smokers.

### **Marketing to minors**

R.J. Reynolds and Philip Morris are testing the advertising limits of the settlement agreement. They contend the agreement applies only to cigarettes and snus is not a cigarette.

The tobacco companies recently filed a First Amendment lawsuit against the Federal Drug Administration which regulates tobacco sales. The agreement bans tobacco companies from using logos or color when advertising its products in publications with readerships of more than 15 percent minors. The companies claim the 15 percent rule violates their right of freedom of expression.

Reynolds already advertises its Camel snus in popular, glossy magazines such as Sports Illustrated, Maxim, and Rolling Stone.

Some snus supporters argue that snus helps smokers give up smoking. Michael Thun, however, vice president of epidemiology for the American Cancer Society, says there is no evidence that smokers stop smoking when they start using snus.

The tobacco companies want smokers to use snus and continue smoking. They advertise snus as a way for smokers to satisfy the need for cigarettes when smoking is not possible, such as in restaurants, theaters, churches, hospitals and other places banning smoking.

Currently, snus sells mostly to men. Tobacco companies hope to expand its appeal to women by offering Snus in new forms. Reynolds is test marketing dissolvable Snus in Indianapolis and Columbus, Ohio. Camel Orbs contain tobacco in small mint pellets similar to Tic Tacs. Camel Strips resemble Listerine breath-freshening strips and melt in the mouth.

The tobacco industry offers a product that threatens to increase tobacco use in minors. It does so in a manner especially attractive to young people.

Advertising snus in magazines popular with young people, such as Sports Illustrated and Rolling Stone, introduces the product to minors.

The companies package snus in sleek, colorful containers that prominently display their logos. The ads and packaging compare to what the industry used previously that minors found so enticing.

Snus also comes in various flavors, such as mint and winter green, which appeal to minors and mask the harsh tobacco taste.

The low cost of snus makes it easier for children to buy it. Minors use snus without fear of detection by parents or others. School administrators and teachers fear its use by students with no way for school officials to prevent it.

Snus is a convenient and socially acceptable way to hook more people on nicotine, including minors. Like other tobacco products it may take 20 or more years before scientists fully know the health problems caused by Snus. But the use of snus looks like one more way to die of a tobacco related illness.