

*"I don't believe that the evidence has established that [secondhand smoke] is a danger to non-smokers."* Dr. Sharon Boyse, Director of Scientific Issues, Brown & Williamson Tobacco Company, 6/12/2000.

August 15, 2001

Dear Friends in the Research Community:

The Institute for Science and Health (funded by the Brown & Williamson tobacco company) has been contacting many people and organizations in the tobacco control and tobacco-research communities to solicit their participation in a forum titled "Tobacco Science and Health Policy," scheduled to occur on October 2-3, 2001 in St. Louis, Missouri. We are writing to urge you not to attend this conference.

The proposed conference is being portrayed as an effort to initiate a dialogue on the question of how to create a framework for researchers and others to work with tobacco industry funding for research purposes. However, in our view, the absence of federal oversight of tobacco products, and the tobacco industry's history of abuse of its findings of what it has always described as "independent" research, places the results of any forum under a cloud of doubt and skepticism since Brown & Williamson has a clear financial stake in the outcome of the forum and any research conducted subsequent to the forum.

Tobacco and tobacco companies are different from pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical companies. Tobacco products kill; they don't treat illness and disease; and, tobacco companies have a long history of putting corporate profits above public health. Tobacco companies have, in the past, used the call for less hazardous products as a tool to continue to market their hazardous products and keep people smoking rather than to reduce the death toll from tobacco. There is no evidence that they can be trusted anymore today.

Those of us who work every day to prevent and reduce tobacco use and reduce the enormous harms caused by the tobacco companies and their products are painfully aware of the tobacco companies' ability to use events such as this proposed conference as part of a broad, carefully calculated strategy to improve their image with policymakers, jurors, and the public; to evade reasonable constraints on their marketing efforts; and to continue maximizing their sales and profits. While similar meetings and initiatives have been pursued in the past – most recently by a Brown & Williamson conference in New Orleans on community-based anti-youth-smoking efforts (even as it continued to market to children) and through Philip Morris's ongoing External Research Program – they have, for the most part, been rejected by the tobacco control and research communities. We believe the St. Louis conference should be no different.

Some of us who have signed this letter believe that no credible researcher or scientific, academic, or public health organization should accept tobacco-industry research funding, especially given the continuing absence of effective federal government regulation of tobacco products (something Brown & Williamson publicly opposes). Others of us believe that there are some circumstances or procedures within which tobacco-industry funding might be acceptable. All of us believe that there should be research both on how to reduce the harm caused by tobacco and

how to regulate the tobacco industry to achieve that goal – that is not the issue. Regardless of which position you may hold, here’s why we believe you should not attend this conference:

- **There is no control over how Brown & Williamson will use the conference, and its related findings, in the future.** No matter how well intentioned the conference organizers and attendees may be, there is no way for them to control the manner in which Brown & Williamson will use and manipulate the conference and its findings to its own advantage. Brown & Williamson is sure to list the conference in the company's annual reports and elsewhere to support its claims that it has changed its ways and is now a good corporate citizen – and to divert attention from its continuing efforts to avoid responsible marketing restrictions or reasonable government oversight.
- **The proposed conference's tobacco-company funding is incompatible with its subject matter.** Although a conference or symposium is needed to discuss whether and under what conditions it may be appropriate to accept tobacco company money, it is inappropriate for any such conference to be funded by a tobacco company. Rather, those interested in this issue should urge organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, the American Legacy Foundation, or major academic institutions to fund a program (or series of programs) dedicated to a thorough and complete discussion of this subject -- including careful consideration of the threshold question of whether independent researchers or research institutions should ever accept any tobacco funding in the first place, particularly until there is federal regulation of this industry.
- **The proposed agenda for the conference already reflects and promotes Brown & Williamson's financial interests, while downplaying public health concerns.** Besides implying that the tobacco industry has a legitimate role as a funder of research into the harms of tobacco products and how to reduce them, the proposed conference agenda specifically focuses on harm-reduction research (as defined by Brown & Williamson), which is of particular financial interest to the tobacco industry, but excludes topics the tobacco companies do not want explored, such as prevention and cessation.

Finally, it is an unfortunate reality, but the fact is that researchers who have attended these types of meetings in the past, or who have accepted tobacco funding for their research, have had the results of their research called into question and have been cut off from various sources of funding due to their association because of the tobacco industry’s history of misuse of this research. Already, researchers who have accepted tobacco funding for their research are faced with more stringent disclosure requirements by academic journals, and have had both their results\* and their own integrity called into question. Moreover, because of conflict of interest concerns, some independent funders of tobacco-related research will not provide grants to those who have already taken tobacco industry money.

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\* While most researchers are honest and well-intentioned, there is evidence that receiving tobacco funding distorts research findings. A study published in the May 28, 1998 *Journal of the American Medical Association*, for example, found that the only way to predict whether a medical journal article on passive smoking would conclude that it was not hazardous was to determine whether the author had received tobacco industry funding.

Again, we urge you to refuse to participate in the proposed Brown & Williamson tobacco research conference – and support an independent summit on the critical issue of tobacco-industry funding of independent researchers and academic institutions.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this issue.<sup>†</sup>

Sincerely,

John R. Seffrin, Ph.D.  
Chief Executive Officer, American Cancer Society

M. Cass Wheeler  
Chief Executive Officer, American Heart Association

John L. Kirkwood  
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Randolph D. Smoak, Jr., M.D.  
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<sup>†</sup> For more information on the topic of tobacco-industry funding of tobacco-control research, please see Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco, *SRNT Position Statement on Philip Morris External Research Program*, [www.srnt.org/resources/philipmorris.htm](http://www.srnt.org/resources/philipmorris.htm); U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Accepting Funds from the Tobacco Industry: CDC Guidance for Collaboration with the Private Sector*, [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/tobaccostatement.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/tobaccostatement.htm); and California Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program, "Tobacco Industry Funding: Implications for the Scientific Community," *Burning Issues*, 4(1) March 2001, <http://www.ucop.edu/srphome/trdrp>.