

# TOBACCO EXAMINER

A Monthly Newsletter of Writers Against Aids and Tobacco Smoking

February Edition

## **1998: SMOKING: STUDIES DETAIL TOBACCO USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS, MINORITIES**

Archives consist of articles that originally appeared in Collier's Year Book (for events of 1997 and earlier) or as monthly updates in Encarta Yearbook (for events of 1998 and later). Because they were published shortly after events occurred, they reflect the information available at that time. Cross references refer to Archive articles of the same year.

### **1998: Smoking: Studies Detail Tobacco Use Among Adolescents, Minorities**

Studies examining tobacco use among adolescents and minorities fueled a drive to draft comprehensive tobacco legislation in the United States Congress in April 1998. But a Senate bill unveiled early in the month led five major tobacco companies to end their cooperation with the government's efforts to regulate the industry.

A study published in the April 3 edition of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) "Morbidity Mortality Weekly Report" (MMWR) showed that 42.7 percent of approximately 16,000 high school-age children polled in 1997 had used some type of tobacco product within the previous month. The study also found that the number of high school cigarette smokers rose by 32 percent between 1991 and 1997, including an 80 percent rise among black teenagers. Health officials were troubled because low smoking rates among black teenagers had been considered an ongoing success story.

Surgeon General David Satcher also addressed the impact of tobacco use on the black community in a report issued on April 27, 1998. Titled "Tobacco Use Among U.S. Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups," it was the first-ever report by a surgeon general to focus on tobacco use among racial and ethnic minorities. According to the report, the rise of tobacco use among black teenagers means that 1.6 million blacks currently under the age of 18 will become regular smokers, and about 500,000 of those will die of a smoking-related disease.

Cigarette smoking is a leading cause of death and disease among blacks, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics, the report said. Although most groups, including blacks, have experienced a drop in respiratory cancer rates, rates among Native Americans rose in the 1990s. Nearly 40 percent of Native American adults smoke cigarettes, compared with 25 percent of adults nationwide.

Senators serving on the Senate Commerce Committee said the rise in tobacco use by minors was a deciding factor in their decision to approve, by a vote of 19-1 on April 1, a bill that could end up costing the tobacco industry more than \$500 billion over 25 years. Authored by Senator John McCain, an Arizona Republican, the bill differs substantially from the proposed \$368.5 billion settlement negotiated in June 1997.

Like the June 1997 settlement, the McCain bill would restrict advertising and marketing efforts by tobacco companies and would impose fines if the number of teenage smokers did not fall. But it would also impose new taxes totaling about \$1.10 per pack by 2003 and would give the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) broader authority to regulate tobacco. Tobacco companies' legal liabilities would be capped at \$6.5 billion per year, but they would not be protected from class-action lawsuits or punitive damages. A *class-action lawsuit* is a lawsuit filed by one or more plaintiffs on behalf of everyone with the same grievance.

The proposed changes so angered the industry that five major tobacco companies—RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company, Philip Morris Companies, Lorillard Tobacco Company, Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, and the U.S. Tobacco Company—announced on April 8 that they would stop cooperating with the government and fight the passage of tobacco legislation. The move could block efforts to restrict the marketing and advertising of tobacco, experts said, because the curbs laid out in the McCain bill would likely be struck down in court unless supported by the industry.

In another blow to the tobacco industry, the House Commerce Committee on April 22 posted 39,000 previously secret tobacco industry documents on the Internet. The documents bolstered widely held suspicions that tobacco companies ignored or suppressed evidence of the adverse health effects caused by tobacco.