

[Letter from P. Sheehy to P. Crawford regarding the development of a 'safe' cigarette]

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29th December 1986

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I confirm the substance of our position on fundamental research which we discussed with you on your recent visit.

I have reviewed the position with my colleagues. Since there is such a wide discrepancy between your approach and that of the rest of the Group, I thought that I should write to explain why it is that I cannot support your contention that we should give a higher priority to projects aimed at developing a 'safe' cigarette (as perceived by those who claim our current product is 'unsafe') by either eliminating, or at least reducing to acceptable levels, all components claimed by our critics to be carcinogenic.

The BAT objective is and should be to make the whole subject of smoking acceptable to the authorities and to the public at large since this is the real challenge facing the Industry. Not only do I believe that this is the right objective but I also believe that it is an achievable one.

The Group already has several approaches in place to respond to this objective. These include experimental science, carried out both internally and at leading universities/medical departments, and also studies of the evidence from epidemiological work.

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There are many issues that contribute to the overall acceptability of smoking. Understandably, the causation issue in relation to several diseases is important and we have to take note of all relevant publications that can throw light on this issue. We sponsor research work on mechanism of disease, including psychological or genetic predisposition, as well as probing the simple conclusions of what is probably rather poor epidemiology. Wherever strong guidance is offered by reputable scientists on product modification, which they believe would be desirable, we will respond. The Group has several research projects, mainly in the combustion area, that should enable us to alter our product if good reason exists. This encompasses components such as nitrosamines and free radicals but extends to the ability to genetically alter tobacco leaf, for instance in its propensity to form tar.

Another important issue affecting acceptability is passive smoking. Our current initiatives are to challenge the whole area of 'low risk epidemiology'. There are reputable external experts who believe that this is a highly imprecise science and we are finding means for them to express their concerns. In parallel, we have research programmes measuring the composition of ambient smoke under carefully controlled conditions; other of our research teams are seeking products that reduce the burden of overall smoke or its particular components in the environment.

As part of an integrated approach to the acceptability of smoking, we are also studying the so-called 'benefits of smoking'. We are supporting research on the pharmacological effects of nicotine (the key element of our product which, fortunately, has few adversaries). The beneficial associations of smoking not only with specific diseases such as Parkinson's disease, but with the widespread disorders of senile dementia or Alzheimer's disease are being monitored.

The BAT view is thus wider than that encompassed in the Imasco approach. Furthermore, I believe there are other important objections inherent in your approach.

Firstly, your objective is probably unattainable - no matter what can be done in chemical terms (and I believe this to be very limited) there will continue to be strong vocal factions that seek to denigrate the product and they are likely to continue to move the goal posts away from whatever initial target we were able to achieve.

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achieve.

A second practical objection is that in attempting to develop a 'safe' cigarette you are, by implication in danger of being interpreted as accepting that the current product is 'unsafe' and this is not a position that I think we should take.

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As you can see, there is no disagreement on the importance that we all place on the need for fundamental research leading to results which will have a practical impact on the acceptability of our product.

Where we part company from the Imasco approach is that we do not believe that there is a sufficiently high chance of a successful outcome to justify committing the very large scale of resources that would be necessary to pursue the direct but arguably over-simplistic approach which your people are proposing. This is why I cannot support this line of research.

However, this does not mean that the debate as to the best approach to this important question is closed and I hope that there will be continuing discussion both among the Group's senior research personnel and among ourselves as to the most effective way to move towards our common objective.

I look forward to discussing this further with you next time we meet.

Yours sincerely,

P. SHEEHY

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