

Tobacco Industry Prevention Programs *“Operation ID School Zone”*



In view of the recent deterioration of the tobacco industry's reputation worldwide, tobacco multinationals have increased their efforts to create for themselves a more positive image.

Their “youth prevention programs” are a major component of this offensive. The industry uses them, among others things, to refute accusations regarding their efforts to recruit young people and to prevent additional controls on their marketing activities.

Nonetheless, the tobacco industry's interests are in complete conflict with any purported desire to reduce youth smoking: its profitability — indeed, its very survival — depends on smoking uptake by youths. This is a matter of economic necessity for the industry: the vast majority of smokers (90%) start before the age of 18.

If the tobacco industry were truly serious about reducing youth smoking, it would stop promoting cigarettes through celebrities and activities that are popular with young people. It would stop opposing effective measures such as tax hikes, smoking restrictions and a ban on tobacco sponsorship. It would stop denying the full effects of smoking and second-hand smoke on health.

If the tobacco industry really wanted to prevent tobacco sales to minors, it would penalize offending retailers by prohibiting them from selling their cigarettes.

Instead, the tobacco industry launches programs such as *“Operation ID School Zone”*. This campaign is designed and funded by the Canadian Tobacco Manufacturers' Council and distributed through the Canadian Coalition for Responsible Tobacco Retailing, whose members include tobacco wholesalers, retailers and distributors. The main component of this campaign consists of the distribution of posters, pamphlets and stickers to stores that sell tobacco. Sometimes the campaign takes on a wider approach by reaching out to community groups and leaders in order to obtain their endorsement (as it has done in the regions of Chicoutimi and Jonquière).

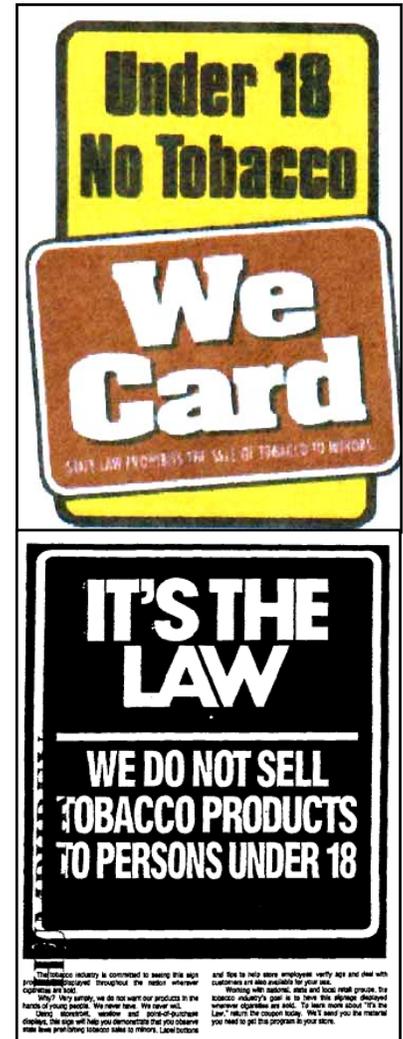
1) The tobacco industry runs similar programs all around the world.

In 1982, the U.S. Tobacco Institute (American counterpart of the Canadian Tobacco Manufacturers Council) stated that implementing a “positive program” to meet the “multiple challenges” facing the industry was urgent.¹ According to a director from Philip Morris: *“If we can frame proactive legislation or other kinds of action on the Youth Access issue ... we will be protecting our industry for decades to come.”*²

In 1990, the industry launched the program “It’s the Law” (whose main components are all found in its Canadian counterpart Operation ID). “It’s the Law” was replaced with much fanfare in 1995 by the program “We

Card” and is distributed by the leading American tobacco manufacturers as well as the Coalition for Responsible Tobacco Retailing.

Youth access programs dominate the youth prevention initiatives of British American Tobacco (owner of Imperial Tobacco) with 15 projects in about a dozen countries, as well as those of Philip Morris, who is participating in no less than 57 youth access prevention programs³.



2) The true objectives of these programs are very different from what the industry publicly claims.

Tobacco manufacturers use their youth access programs as “evidence” that they are opposed to youth smoking, that they are responsible corporate citizens, and that they don’t need additional controls from governments.

However, internal tobacco industry documents clearly state the real objectives of youth access programs. For example, a memo from Philip Morris reads:

“As we discussed, the ultimate means for determining the success of this program will be:

- 1) A reduction in legislation introduced and passed restricting or banning our sales and marketing activities;***
- 2) Passage of legislation favorable to the industry;***
- 3) Greater support from business, parent, and teacher groups.”⁴***

The goal, therefore, is not to reduce tobacco use, but to prevent legislative measures that could hinder the industry’s marketing efforts aimed at young people!

¹ Tobacco Institute Executive Committee. “The Development of Tobacco Industry Strategy.” 1982.

² Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “A Long History of Empty Promises: The Tobacco Industry’s Youth Anti-Tobacco Programs.” 1999.

³ Action on Smoking and Health [UK]. “Danger! PR in the Playground.” 2000.

⁴ Slavitt, J. J. “TI Youth Initiative.” 12 February 1991. [Philip Morris memo, available from <http://www.pmdocs.com/getallimg.asp?DOCID=2500082629>]

3) Operation ID is nothing but a public relations exercise.

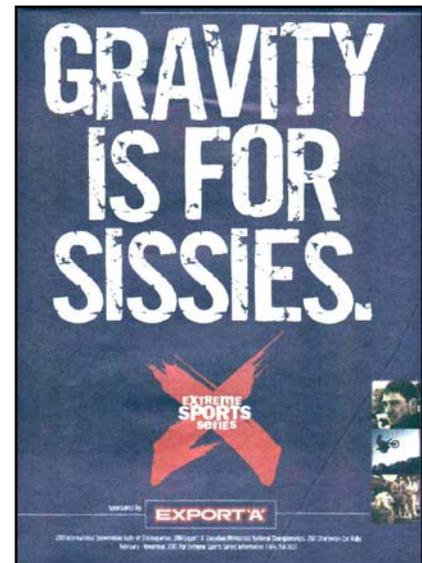
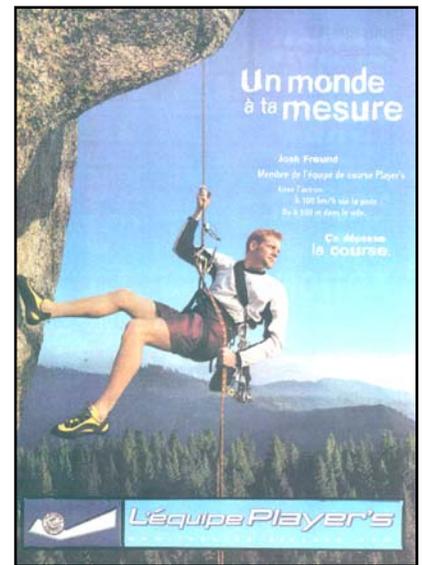
These programs help the industry counter its bad reputation by creating the false impression that it cares about young people's health and by associating itself with respectable community organizations. Accordingly, the large array of public relations activities promoting *Operation ID* draws attention away from the fact that the industry is carrying on with its marketing efforts aimed at teenagers, that it is being prosecuted for its involvement in cigarette smuggling, that it denies the health effects of second-hand smoke, that it manipulates nicotine levels in cigarettes to increase addiction... and the list goes on.

When one considers the results of the program's implementation in Chicoutimi and Jonquière, one can see that it has generated lots of great publicity for itself, the industry and retailers. But if one considers the program's impact on compliance or on youth smoking rates, it is an abysmal failure.

⇓⇓⇓ OPERATION ID "EVENTS" AND "ACTIVITIES"



CURRENT ADS FOR PLAYER'S AND EXPORT 'A' CIGARETTES ⇓⇓⇓



4) Retailer education programs do not work.

Independent scientific studies show that retailers' education programs have no measurable impact on tobacco sales to minors⁵. The effects are temporary at best. It is no wonder when one considers that these programs focus on education, that participation is voluntary, and that there is no inspection system or penalties to reprimand offenders.

Since the program's launching in Chicoutimi and Jonquière at the community level in September 2000, Operation ID School Zone has, in fact, been associated with a decrease in compliance—in spite of the fact that 93% of retailers participate in the program. According to Health Canada, the number of retailers selling cigarettes to minors jumped from 28% (summer 1999) to 36% (winter 2000-2001)⁶.

We must not kid ourselves. Retailers are commercial businesses whose goal it is to make money. In Quebec, cigarette sales to minors represent eight million dollars in annual profits for retailers. Without appropriate economic incentives to counter this income (i.e. substantial and systematic financial penalties), sales to minors will continue.

5) Banning cigarette sales to minors in and of itself has little effect on youth smoking rates.

There is a good reason why the industry choose to focus on limiting access to tobacco in its public relations campaign: it is one of the most ineffective measures to fight against youth smoking. (Reducing tobacco sales to minors by retailers is very different from reducing tobacco use by young people.) The measure addresses only the *source* of where teenagers get their cigarettes. It doesn't in any way address young people's *desire* to smoke. The industry knows that if kids want to smoke, they can easily get around the law by finding one corner store that sells to minors, by asking a passing stranger, friend or an older sibling to purchase cigarettes for them, or by getting false ID. Experts in health promotion say that to have a real impact on smoking rates amongst youth, compliance has to reach at least 90%⁷ - a compliance rate that doesn't exist in any Canadian city. Others concluded that any impact of laws prohibiting sales to minors is likely to be small⁸.

6) Operation ID helps the industry avoid truly effective measures.

When Canadian industry associations and retailers discuss youth smoking, they inevitably advocate reducing access—by raising retailer awareness through Operation ID. No other measure, such as raising cigarette prices or banning tobacco promotion, is put forward as a way to tackle youth smoking.

Operation ID also assists retailers in condemning punitive measures (such as fines) aimed at those who are found guilty of illegal sales to minors. Yet storekeepers have known since 1994 that selling cigarettes to minors is prohibited. How many more years of "awareness-raising" do they need before they should be subject to the law like everybody else?

⁵ DiFranza, Savageau & Aisquith. "Youth Access to Tobacco: The Effects of Age, Gender, Vending Machine Locks, and "It's the Law" Programs." *American Journal of Public Health*, 1996.

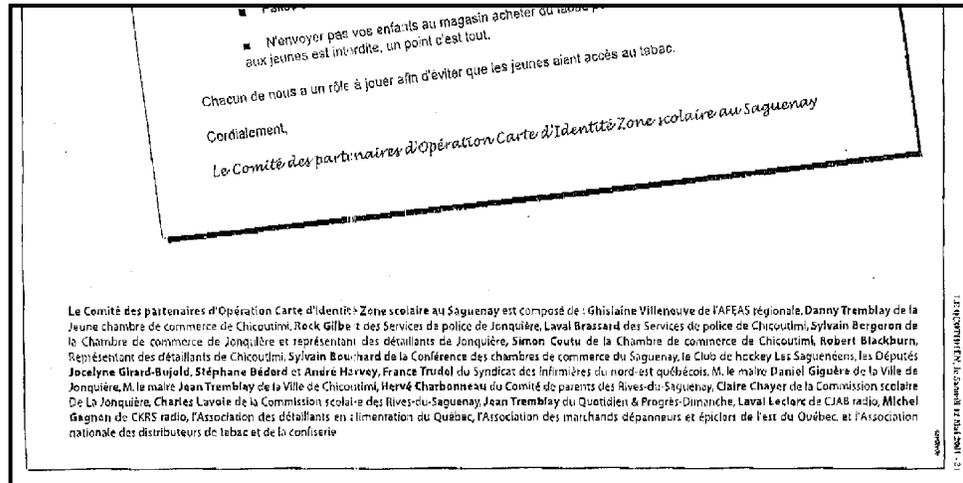
⁶ A.C. Nielsen. "Measurement of Retailer Compliance With Respect to the Tobacco Act & Provincial Tobacco Sales-To-Minors Legislation." (2000/01), March 2001. [Prepared for Health Canada]

⁷ DiFranza, J. et al. "A Model for the Efficient and Effective Enforcement of Tobacco Sales Laws." *American Journal of Public Health* 88 (1998) : 1100-1101.

⁸ "Effective Health Care: Preventing the Uptake of Smoking in Young People"; University of York, octobre 1999

7) Operation ID monopolizes the time and support of community leaders and organizations around a useless initiative.

In Chicoutimi and Jonquière, dozens of community leaders and organizations have lent their support to the program, including the cities, police departments and boards of trade of Jonquière and Chicoutimi. Their endorsement is no doubt based on genuine concern for young people's health but the fact is, their support benefits none other than the tobacco industry.



PAID ADVERTISING LISTING THE PARTNERS

Aside from the ineffectiveness of the campaign in reducing youth smoking, Operation ID gives participating members a false sense of accomplishment, in that they think they are contributing to the fight against youth smoking when in reality they are not.

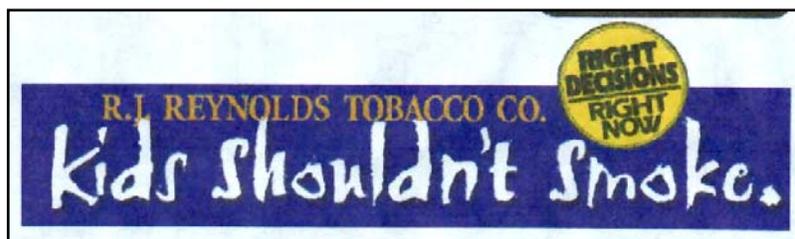
Paid advertisements of 'open letters' enumerating program partners and sending useless messages like *"let retailers know you support them"* do not serve any other purpose except to make supporters feel good about their support and to distract everyone's attention from other more effective and essential tobacco control measures.

8) Operation ID increases the appeal of smoking to teenagers.

In addition to being ineffective, the message delivered by such programs—namely that "kids shouldn't smoke"—reinforces the industry's marketing efforts which position tobacco as a forbidden fruit and as a badge of maturity. (It is important to distinguish between 'objectives' and 'messages'. While we may agree with the objective that teenagers shouldn't smoke, it does not follow that this is the appropriate message to send to teenagers to try to bring it about.⁹)

A Philip Morris International document states:

"... we refined the objective of a juvenile initiative program as follows: "Maintain and proactively protect our ability to advertise, promote and market our products via a ... series of programs and events to discourage juvenile smoking because smoking is an adult decision."¹⁰ [Emphasis added]



⁹ Action on Smoking and Health [UK]. "Danger! PR in the Playground." 2000.

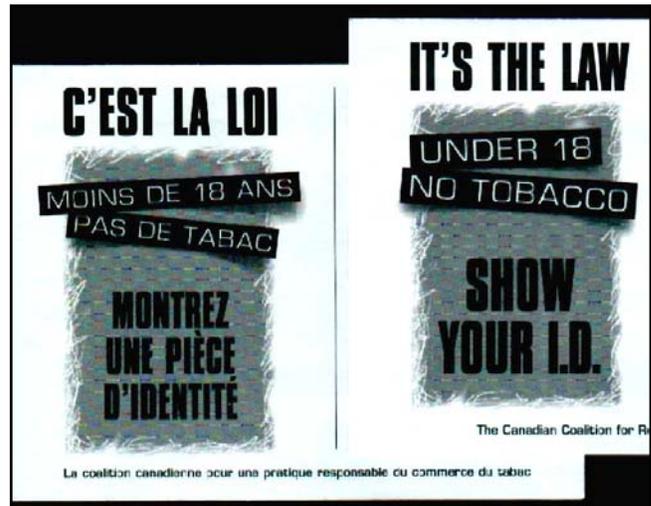
¹⁰ Leiber, C. L. [Director, Corporate Affairs, Latin America Region]. « Brainstorming Session: Youth Initiatives », May 11 1995. [From Web site <http://www.pmdocs.com/getallimg.asp?if=avpidx&DOCID=2503019012/9014>].

Young people's attraction to smoking lies precisely in this "adult" image created through industry marketing. As an internal industry document states: ***"In the young smoker's mind, a cigarette falls into the same category with wine, beer, ... declaration of independence and striving for self-identity.... Thus, an attempt to reach young smokers, starters, should be based, among others, on the following major parameters: [1] Present the cigarette as one of the few initiations into the adult world."***¹¹ [Emphasis added]

In fact, the posters, stickers and flyers of *Operation ID* (and similar programs) virtually scream that smoking is for adults only.

(Take a close look at the posters: they are usually addressed to minors, not to retailers.)

There is no mention of negative health effects from smoking nor of nicotine addiction...



So the message is not that smoking is bad, but rather that smoking is acceptable – even desirable– as long as one is an adult, and that teenagers have to wait until they are 18 before they can light up. Can one imagine a better way of catering to young people's desire to be like adults?

The choice of partners for Operation ID is also strategic. Parents, teachers, politicians and other authority figures are precisely those against which teenagers rebel. An internal Philip Morris document regarding its youth programs explains: ***"We are also working with parent and teacher organizations to ensure that minors receive support and education in regard to smoking being an adult practice."***¹² [Emphasis added]

But when it really counts, the industry uses attractive models and sports celebrities like racecar driver Jacques Villeneuve... to advertise its cigarettes!

9) Quebec health groups oppose the "Operation ID" program.

The following tobacco control groups have called for a boycott of Operation ID School Zone:

- the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control;
- the Quebec Lung Association;
- the Quebec Public Health Association;
- the Non-Smokers' Rights Association (Quebec Office);
- the Quebec Council on Tobacco and Health;
- the Canadian Cancer Society (Quebec Division).

¹¹ Bates, T. "What we have learned from People: A Conceptual Summarization of 18 Focus Group Interviews on the Subject of Smoking." Marketing and Research Counselors, New York, 26 May 1975.

¹² Slavitt, J. J. "TI Youth Initiative." 12 February 1991. [Philip Morris memo, available from <http://www.pmdocs.com/getallimg.asp?DOCID=2500082629>]