

Press Release: For immediate use

Brussels February 28, 2007

THE WAIFER OF PAPER THAT WOULD SAVE 1000 LIVES

MEPs meeting in Brussels today pledged themselves to pursue a low cost, low tech product reform that is set to save thousands of lives across Europe. After a hearing convened by Arlene McCarthy MEP Chairwoman of the European Parliament Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection taking evidence from international experts, politicians and members of civil society signed a pledge to pursue Europe-wide implementation of a standard for fire safer cigarettes.

Already law in Canada and an ever growing list of US states, RIP (Reduced Ignition Propensity) cigarettes look like other cigarettes, taste like other cigarettes and cost the same as other cigarettes. But, unlike other cigarettes, they are designed to go out when they are left unattended. MEPs are backing a proposal before the European Commission to require manufacturers to sell only cigarettes that comply to the standard¹. London Fire Commissioner Val Shawcross told the committee that the measure could reduce by two thirds the number of domestic fire deaths. European Commission experts have estimated that 1000 lives would be saved across the European Union every year.

How cigarette manufacturers meet the standard is up to them. They could change the chemical make up of the cigarettes or the paper or they could change the density of the cigarettes but the most popular solution so far has been to introduce two wafer thin bands of paper that act as "speed bumps". Inhaling as normal, the cigarettes will burn as normal but left unattended the thickened paper chokes out the flame. This, say campaigners is enough to protect sleepy smokers and their families.

The panel also took evidence from Dr Jacques Latarjet, Former President of the "Société Française d'étude et traitement des brulures" and former President of the European Burn Association who shocked the committee with case studies of burns victims said,

'For many industrialised countries cigarettes are the leading cause of deadly fires. I have had to treat many cases of burns victims and people cannot imagine the extent to which their injuries are horrific and painful. Many of these people will be impaired for the rest of their lives. Since it is possible to modify these cigarettes to reduce their ignition propensity, we have to do everything we can to prevent these tragedies. The European Union must act as quickly as possible'

Speaking after the hearing Arlene McCarthy said,

'There is no such thing as a safe cigarette but RIP cigarettes would be an effective, low cost way to reduce fires and fire deaths across Europe.'

Catherine Stihler MEP added,

'The burden of death and disfigurement does not fall equally on European citizens. Higher smoking prevalence, poor housing and inexpensive furniture put the poorest families at highest risk and older people or people with disabilities are less likely to escape the burning building.'

Liz Lynne, a long-time anti-smoking campaigner further commented,

'Although I would prefer it if people did not smoke at all as that would be the safer option, we must be realistic. Cigarettes are responsible for a large proportion of accidental and preventable deaths from fire right across Europe, killing smokers and non smokers alike. Whilst cigarettes always carry a danger to those who choose to smoke them, they should never risk the lives of others.'

François Damphousse, who lobbied successfully for similar legislation across Canada warned that Big Tobacco would do all they can to obstruct reform.

"The industry will obviously come up with many reasons to oppose reduced ignition propensity cigarettes. However, the answer to all of the industry's claims can be found in its own internal research documents. The industry has known for quite some time that it is technically and commercially feasible to manufacture RIP cigarettes. Actually, the industry has the obligation to produce only such cigarettes to protect the public from the fires caused by current products. Unfortunately, once again, the health community has to call upon governments to correct the situation."

The UK national RIP Coalition, a group which includes, fire fighters, burns victims and surgeons launched their website todayⁱⁱ. The group's spokesman, Martin Dockrell said,

“All across Europe, coalitions like ours are springing up. We are sure that the Commission will do the right thing but the tobacco industry will argue for 3 to 5 years delay to prepare for the switch over. Every year of delay will cost 1000 more lives and millions of Euro in property and health care”

Meanwhile, Big Tobacco continue to put the blame on the public,

“There is no such thing as a fire safer cigarette and the simple fact is that careless use and disposal of cigarettes can cause smoking related fires”ⁱⁱⁱ

Notes to Editors

- (1) The Hearing on Fire Safer Cigarettes took place on Wednesday 28 February from 12.30pm to 14.00pm at the European Parliament.** The event was hosted by Arlene McCarthy MEP, Chairwoman of the European Parliament Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, and the EU RIP Alliance.
- (2) Interviews with the speakers and representatives of the sponsoring organisations can be arranged** through Florence Berteletti Kemp on behalf of the EU RIP Alliance Tel: +0032 (0) 496 12 43 02
- (3) Created in 2006, The EU RIP Alliance is a new independent and flexible partnership between the Smoke Free Partnership, the European Child Safety Alliance, EuroSafe (www.childsafetyeurope.org), the European Older People’s Platform (www.age-platform.org), the European Federation of Nurses Associations (www.efnweb.eu/version1/en/index.html), the European Public Health Alliance (www.epha.org), Eurocare (www.eurocare.org), PGEU (www.pgeu.org), the Health & Environment Alliance (www.env-health.org), the London’s European Office (www.london.gov.uk) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) www.ash.org.uk (London).
- (4) Given that it is technologically and economically feasible for cigarettes to meet fire-safety standards, the EU RIP Alliance aims to promote in collaboration with other EU organisations such as the European Fire Safety Network, the introduction of reduced-ignition propensity based on the same standard as in New York and Canada (ASTM International) E2187.
- (5) ASTM2187 *Standard Test Method for Measuring the Ignition Strength of Cigarettes*. The test measures the frequency of cigarettes extinguishing when left unattended. It is based on the *Cigarette Extinction Test Method* developed by the United States National Institute of Standards and Technology. In this test, a lit cigarette is placed on a set number (three, ten or fifteen) of layers of standard laboratory filter paper. The filter paper acts as a heat sink for the burning cigarette. Once the cigarette coal has cooled to a certain temperature, it should self-extinguish. The more layers of filter paper used, the sooner the cigarette should self-extinguish. For each number of layers of filter paper, the procedure is repeated 40 times. Failure is defined as the cigarette burning its full length. The results are then presented as "percent full-length burns."

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- ⁱ ASTM 2187 www.astm.org
 - ⁱⁱ www.firesafercigarettes.org.uk
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Tobacco Manufacturers Briefing TMA January 2007