

Press Release WHO/29

9 March 1998

PASSIVE SMOKING DOES CAUSE LUNG CANCER, DO NOT LET THEM FOOL YOU

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been publicly accused of suppressing information. Its opponents say that WHO has withheld from publication its own report that was aimed at but supposedly failed to scientifically prove that there is an association between passive smoking, or environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), and a number of diseases, lung cancer in particular. *Both statements are untrue.*

The study in question is a case-control study on the effects of ETS on lung cancer risk in European populations, which has been carried out over the last seven years by 12 research centres in 7 European countries under the leadership of WHO's cancer research branch -- the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

The results of this study, which have been completely misrepresented in recent news reports, are very much in line with the results of similar studies both in Europe and elsewhere: *passive smoking causes lung cancer in non-smokers.*

The study found that there was an estimated 16% increased risk of lung cancer among non-smoking spouses of smokers. For workplace exposure the estimated increase in risk was 17%. However, due to small sample size, neither increased risk was statistically significant. Although, the study points towards a decreasing risk after cessation of exposure.

In February 1998, according to usual scientific practice, a paper reporting the main study results was sent to a reputable scientific journal for consideration and peer review. That is why the full report is not yet publicly available. Under the circumstances, however, the authors of the study have agreed to make an abstract of the report available to the media.

"It is extremely important to note that the results of this study are

consistent with the results of major scientific reviews of this question published during 1997 by the government of Australia, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the State of California", said Neil Collishaw, Acting Chief of WHO's Tobacco or Health Unit in Geneva. "A major meta-analysis of passive smoking and lung cancer was also published in the British Medical Journal in 1997. From these and other previous reviews of the scientific evidence emerges a clear global scientific consensus — passive smoking does cause lung cancer and other diseases", he concluded.

"IARC is proud of the careful scientific work done by the European scientific team responsible for this study", commented Dr Paul Kleihues, the Agency's director. "We are very concerned about the false and misleading statements recently published in the mass media. It is no coincidence that this misinformation originally appeared in the British press just before the No-Tobacco Day in the United Kingdom and the scheduled publication of the report of the British Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health".

Further information on the health effects of passive smoking is available in WHO's Advisory Kit for World No-Tobacco Day 1998 on the World Wide Web at www.who.ch/ntday, as well as from WHO's Tobacco or Health Unit, Programme on Substance Abuse.

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