



BAT should butt out of smoking 'reforms'

Tobacco companies should have no role in anti-litter campaigns, writes **SIMON CHAPMAN**

THERE are about 2.9 million smokers in Australia, who on average smoke about 17 cigarettes a day. Together they generate more than 18 billion non-biodegradable butts a year, of which an estimated seven billion are thrown onto the ground as litter.

Those that are still afloat are responsible for an estimated 4600 fires a year, causing 14 deaths and a minimum of \$80 million in damage.

Butts are easily the single most common form of litter, and comprise 39 per cent of the volume of all litter from all sources.

There is growing concern about this form of unsightly and dangerous pollution. Google Australia shows 18,800 hits for cigarette butts and litter and the tobacco industry has a nasty lungful of this new ill-wind.

Smokers don't just pollute the air in pubs and for everyone around them in al fresco dining areas of restaurants, the world is also their ashtray.

So British American Tobacco has set up the Butt Littering Trust which is coming soon with a big environmentally friendly smile to run a publicity campaign near you. Its staff will give thoughtful smokers a little film canister to store their butts, and suburbs will get awards for running local awareness campaigns.

The Butt Littering Trust is wholly supported by BAT, which sits on its board. The Trust's chairman is adamant that BAT plays no role in shaping the

strategies and goals of reducing butt litter.

So why then is the Trust equally adamant that it will limit its efforts to education and not join with other organisations to try and reduce the number of cigarettes being smoked, and then available to be discarded as litter?

All anti-litter campaigns openly embrace three broad strategies: reducing use, recycling, and education to do the right thing. Serious anti-litter organisations campaign to reduce packaging such as plastic bags, lobby for bottle deposit legislation and tougher fines for littering. The Butt Littering Trust deliberately limits itself to education. Imagine how seriously the community would regard a plastic bag manufacturer setting up a trust to educate shoppers not to discard bags, while lobbying hard to oppose any reduction in bag use.

But it gets worse. Along with long-time tobacco industry ally the Australian Hotels Association, the Trust has recently opposed moves by Newcastle City Council to ban smoking at al fresco tables. Reduced smoking opportunities mean reduced smoking.

More than 25 international studies have shown that when smoking is banned in workplaces, consumption by smokers over 24 hours is reduced by about 20 per cent. When smokers cannot smoke in particular settings, they smoke fewer cigarettes. When fewer cigarettes are smoked, fewer cigarettes are available to be dropped on the ground and

less disease is caused as well.

Reducing the prevalence of smoking would do more than any other strategy to reduce butt pollution. In the 1960s, nearly 70 per cent of Australian men and about 30 per cent of women smoked. Today, just over 17 per cent smoke every day. The only people who discard butts are smokers.

There are 30 per cent of Australian adults today who used to discard butts and now never do, because they are ex-smokers. Effective tobacco control reduces both the number of smokers in the community and the amount of cigarettes smoked per day by continuing smokers. It controls butt littering at source, because it reduces the number of sources who each have on average about 6200 butts to dispose of each year.

Trying to persuade smokers to be more considerate, and introducing law enforcement of anti-littering provisions, are two important components of butt reduction efforts. But they are minor, band-aid contributors to the problem at large. BAT has a naked conflict of interest in addressing the litter question. The Butt Littering Trust directors are either willing or naively unwitting allies in this sham.

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