

REPORT OF THE HEARING AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ON 28 FEBRUARY 2007 WHERE THE EU RIP CIGARRETE ALLIANCE WAS LAUNCHED

By Florence Berteletti-Kemp, Smoke-Free Partnership

A European campaign to ensure that only 'fire-safer' cigarettes are produced and marketed in the EU was launched at a hearing in the European Parliament on 28 February 2007. The event was hosted by Ms Arlene McCarthy, MEP and Chair of the EP Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee and opened by MEP Ms Catherine Sithler. See document below for a detailed report of the hearing and the conclusions.

The invitation only event brought together seven European Parliamentarians, Commission officials, Permanent Representations, local authorities, fire-fighters, health professionals and health and safety NGOs advocates.

Ms Valerie Shawcross, Chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority Board, gave a clear overview of the UK evidence of death and injury caused by home fires started by cigarettes. She stressed the impact that RIP could have if it was introduced in the UK.

Dr Jacques Latarjet - Former President of the "Société Française d'étude et traitement des brûlures" and former President of the European Burns Association stirred participants with case studies of burns victims, stressing that burn injuries are horribly painful and in almost all cases, impair people for the rest of their lives.

François Damphousse, Director at the Quebec Office of Non-Smokers' Rights Association, who lobbied successfully for RIP legislation across Canada, exposed Big Tobacco tactics which include claiming that RIP cigarettes are more toxic and that they do not prevent fires. He explained that the tobacco industry will probably do all it can to obstruct reform at European level because they do not want their products to be classified as 'unsafe'. All three presentations are attached to this mail.

Mr. Jürgen Vogelgesang, DG SANCO, European Commission, Mr. Bjorn Albinson, President of the EU Fire Safety Network and Mr. Martin Dockrell, ASH & UK RIP Coalition then joined the question and answer panel. The session which followed led to a lively debate.

The following points emerged as recommendations from the discussion:

The problem of cigarette related fires is very serious; action to introduce an EU fire safety standard for cigarettes is urgently needed in order to protect children, older people, fire-fighters and other vulnerable groups from avoidable deaths, disfigurement and suffering.

There is no such thing as a 'safe cigarette'; non-smoking and cigarette free homes would be a more effective fire prevention policy. However, reduced ignition propensity (RIP) cigarettes are far safer than current standard cigarettes sold in the European market and also the fastest way to reach our goal: unlike mattresses and sofas or fire detectors, cigarettes are bought and smoked every day throughout the home. Making them fire safer would have an immediate effect in reducing the number of fires and, most importantly, in reducing fire deaths.

None of the arguments rolled out by the tobacco industry to prevent EU measures on RIP

cigarettes, such as claims that RIP cigarettes are more toxic or that they will not be effective to prevent fires, are supported by the facts.

European level legislation is needed so that the same technical standards are used across the Union and that the system is implemented coherently and quickly for maximum impact. Given the unilateral action initiated by the Finnish government to bring in legislation on RIP cigarettes, all EU Member States - and their national committee representatives within the General Safety Product Directive - should take the necessary steps so that a mandate for an EU fire safer cigarette standard is rapidly sent to the European Committee for Standardization (CEN).

As a Parliamentarian responsible for the coherency of the internal market, Mrs. Arlene McCarthy concluded the hearing by stressing that it would take a long time to get 27 Member States to introduce national legislation. This could also lead to different standards and unequal levels of safety for citizens through the EU. Regulation at European level on RIP cigarettes should be consistent with the standards already developed in other parts of the world which include some of the EU's largest trading partners.

This landmark event raised awareness among policy-makers and health and safety professionals about the urgency of regulating for RIP cigarettes. The organisers would like to extend special thanks to all of the speakers and participants at the meeting, and to the MEPs who signed the pledge and committed themselves to being champions for RIP within the Parliament.

MEPS who attended the Hearing and Signed the Pledge:

Arlene McCarthy (Chair) UK Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Catherine Stihler (Chair) UK Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Liz Lynne UK Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Baroness Sarah Ludford UK Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Jean Lambert UK Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, Robert Evans UK Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Chris Davies UK Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

MEPS who committed themselves to sign the Pledge at a later stage:

Kathy Sinnott MEP, Adamos Adamou MEP, Gerard ONESTA MEP, Glennis Wilmnott MEP, Brian Simpson MEP, Claude Moraes MEP, Michael Cashman MEP, Dan Jørgensen MEP.