

CLEANING TOBACCO STAINS // PUTTING A "COFFIN NAIL" IN "CANCER STICKS" // A LESSON BY THE NUMBERS

WHAT IF SOMEONE TOLD you that 76.6 million American-made, corporation-backed improvised explosive devices were sold in most major retailers across our fair nation, able to be purchased by Jane & Joe Every-person as soon as maturation allowed? How would the masses feel should those same products be mass marketed in a manner similar to toys? Whether backed by Wally World Wizards in Bentonville or some benign internet startup, "Intentional Eradication Dummies" would be an issue among the collective American conscience with reactions reminiscent of pop culture's most scandalous occasions. No legal authority would be able to stifle protest; thousands of names would adorn petitions. A product that destructive could never exist because the mere idea of anything able to instigate levels

of unrest or harm in a similar manner would be considered inconsiderable. With the aforementioned sentiment in mind, V.J. Sleight researched Big Tobacco's immediate and residual impact, looking at how it effects the lives of Americans, a venture that underscored how pervasive the industry has been to those that have come and will be for many yet to arrive.

According to Sleight, 304,000 youths between the ages of 13 and 18 years of age currently smoke with an estimated 34,000 newcomers ushered into that non-exclusive fraternity daily. 76.6 million packs of cigarettes are sold to young Americans annually, killing 596,600 young men and women under the age of 18 before natural decline allowed. In that period of time approximately 1,114,000 children will become intimately familiar with secondhand smoke. The aforementioned statistics may trouble some; for those not moved, perhaps the coup de grâce will come in knowing that this knowledge was not obtained from a national poll of smoker's habits. These numbers are merely a snapshot of U.S. trends, collected from various sources throughout The Golden State; "as goes California, so goes the nation" indeed.

Championing the right of men and women to, quite literally, pick their poison has allowed a handful of tobacco companies to evolve into enormous multinational entities capable of shaping lives around their endeavor. With a state and federal tax burden estimated at \$621 per household compounded by \$18.1 billion in annual healthcare costs and lost productivity linked directly to smoking. Yet you have to delve deeper to completely comprehend big tobacco's overarching impact; a study in minutia large enough to cast wide swaths across entire populations. Despite the six leading tobacco companies earning \$35 million in 2010, not a single dollar has been spent to contain or renew areas displaying signs of adverse affect; in California alone, \$42 million is spent every year on waste cleanup with one-third

of that amount going toward dealing with cigarette Butts are actually a significant part worldwide trash intake, adding 1.69 billion pounds alone to the estimated international weight, a fact that become more daunting when their non-biodegradable nature which results in a 12 to 15 year breakdown period is taken into account. Yet the trend goes much deeper. 1 in 8 trees cut down goes usage in the tobacco industry. For those of us that are not mathematicians, that means nine million acres of forest is destroyed solely for big tobacco's sustenance. Americans can rest easy; The Republic of Korea has cleared more trees for cigs than anyone, leveling almost half, 45%, of their wooded areas to quench nicotine-fueled hunger.

But what would smoking be without the people? A Yale University study from their esteemed school of medicine

showed that undernourished nations would be much better off, that being capable of growing enough food to have adequate diets, if they quit growing tobacco. Those same people struggle daily with lingering effects of the industry. 25 million people suffer from tobacco-related pesticide poisonings per year in developing countries. 41% of those unfortunate souls cite "green tobacco sickness", a type of nicotine poisoning that occurs when nicotine form the surface of wet tobacco plants is absorbed through skin, as a major cause of sickness. GTS symptoms include vomiting, dizziness, headache, nausea, abnormal cramps, chills, and severe weakness as well as changes in blood pressure and heart rate. Heart and minds can rest easy for there is a cure, of sorts; nicotine intake, namely that derived from usage of tobacco products, will reduce contraction risk. To call aforementioned situation a conundrum is so much more than an understatement; it is outright rotten at its core.

So where does all of this information converge? Not many, even users of tobacco, would argue against tobacco being a killer. With no undo amount of certainty though, it could be hard to argue that the average person is informed of how much damage the pursuit of a single cigarette of chewing tobacco tin causes men, women, and children they will never see. What VJ Sleight has shown through extensive research is how dangerous the tobacco industry has been for customers and non-customers alike while remaining more profitable than the most major multinational brands, earning as much as Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Microsoft combined in 2010. With over 1 billion people expected to die from tobacco use in the 21st Century, it is safe to say that business will continue to thrive unless, of course, changes in understanding and usage are made. A researcher at RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company once said, "if young adults turn away from smoking, the industry will decline, just as a population which does not give birth will eventually dwindle." That statement, uttered in 1984, was as true then as it is today. For anyone that seeks to bring about change better could be known. So, in the words of a somewhat famous 80's cartoon and toy franchise, "now you know, and knowing is half the battle."

But Big Oil and Big Coal have always been as skilled at propaganda as they are at mining and drilling. Like the tobacco industry before them, their success depends on keeping Americans stupid.

~ Jeff Goodell ~