

The seven tactics unhealthy industries use to undermine public health policies

Across Africa there are examples of governments trying to introduce policies that improve health, and protect the environment only to find their efforts undermined by unhealthy corporations, and their industry associations. A case in point is South Africa's efforts to introduce a tax on sugary drinks to reduce the growing burden of obesity. In the process they are facing a barrage of resistance. This is one small example of unhealthy industries undermining the public's health and the global environment.

If you are working to improve public health and the environment in Africa, you need to know what your opponents are up to.

Below is a quick guide to their tactics, which I have assembled as a summary from three sources: Naomi Oreskes and Eric M Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, William Wiist's *The Corporate Playbook*, *Health, and Democracy: The Snack Food and Beverage Industry's Tactics in Context*, and Nicholas Freudenberg's *Lethal but Legal*.



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1. Attack legitimate science

- Accuse science of deception, calling it "junk science" or "bad science," claiming science is manipulated to fulfil a political agenda.
- Attack the scientific institutions and government agencies perceived to be acting against corporate interests.
- Insist that the science is uncertain by claiming scientists don't know what's causing it, and that more research is needed.
- Withholding any data unfavourable to the corporate product.
- Using information in a misleading way; cherry-picking by using facts that are true but irrelevant.
- Insist that there are many causes to a health or environmental problem, and that addressing just one of them will have minimal impact.
- Exaggerate the uncertainty inherent in any scientific endeavour to undermine the status of established scientific knowledge.
- Use corporate-funded studies.
- Fund researchers sympathetic to corporate causes or products.