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# Philip Morris Lashes Back

*PHILIP MORRIS EDITORIAL*  
The \$10 billion suit filed by Philip Morris against the ABC television network is a clear attempt to intimidate further investigation into what may become the vulnerable underbelly of the tobacco industry — its ability to control the dose of addictive nicotine delivered to smokers.

The company aimed its legal fire at several recent ABC programs, led by "Day One," which charged that cigarette manufacturers add nicotine to cigarettes to keep smokers addicted. Philip Morris denied categorically that it does any such thing. It said it simply "recombines" nicotine that has been removed earlier in the production process and does not add any additional nicotine.

Such fine distinctions look like a calculated diversion. Others might ask why the nicotine needs to be put back at all.

By denying so strenuously that its own cigarettes are "spiked" or "fortified" with nicotine, Philip Morris obscures the compelling issue raised by "Day One" and by Dr. David Kessler, Commissioner of Food and Drugs, in his recent Congressional testimony: Do cigarette companies control the nicotine levels in cigarettes, and if so, why?

"Most people," Dr. Kessler said in his testimony, "assume that the nicotine in cigarettes is present solely because it is a natural and unavoidable component of tobacco." Natural, it is; unavoidable, it is not. Numerous patents, Dr. Kessler pointed out, show that the tobacco industry knows very well how to manipulate nicotine levels in cigarettes. Since the technology exists to take it out, he asks, why keep it in at all? What's the gain? To the millions of Americans who have tried and failed to give up smoking, the answer to the last question is increasingly obvious: to keep them puffing.

Philip Morris's righteous rage would be more credible were it not for the duplicity revealed by documents from within the company itself. Last week Congress pried loose a study done by Philip Morris researchers in 1983 that demonstrated the addictive effects of nicotine in rats. That was five years before the Surgeon General declared nicotine an addictive substance, a time when the study could have had an important influence on the country's emerging understanding of the addictive potential of cigarettes. But Philip Morris suppressed the study and blocked its publication.

In another internal document, a Philip Morris research supervisor gave the game away in a 1972 memorandum by acknowledging the true purpose of a cigarette: nicotine delivery. "Think of the cigarette pack as a storage container for a day's supply of nicotine," he wrote. "Think of the cigarette as a dispenser for a dose unit of nicotine." That sounds remarkably like Dr. Kessler's contention that cigarettes are nicotine-delivery systems, making them a fit subject for regulation as a drug.

The F.D.A.'s ability to regulate may depend on whether the nicotine is intended to affect the functioning of the body. But, Dr. Kessler said, the F.D.A. doesn't yet have all the evidence necessary to establish cigarette manufacturers' intent. "It is time for all of us — for the F.D.A., for the Congress, for the American people — to learn more about the way cigarettes are designed," he said.

To that end, Representative Henry Waxman has asked the chief executive officers of seven tobacco companies to testify before the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment on April 14. America has long known that they sell a dangerous product. Whether customers have a "choice," as they claim, about using it is what America must know now.

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