

TECHNOLOGY & SCIENCE

Ex-Philip Morris Scientist Lost Later Job For Allegedly Falsifying Scientific Data

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A former Philip Morris Cos. scientist, who was one of the U.S. government's star witnesses at last month's hearings on the tobacco industry, was fired from a job in 1992 for allegedly falsifying scientific research.

In court papers, DuPont Merck Pharmaceutical Co. says Dr. Victor J. DeNoble was dismissed from his research job at the drug company for "scientific incompetence." DuPont Merck says Dr. DeNoble engaged in "inappropriate and misleading research methods and activities."

Dr. DeNoble sued DuPont Merck for wrongful termination and defamation in 1992 in state court in Wilmington, Del. "We disagree with DuPont Merck's characterization" of Dr. DeNoble's work, says Bayard J. Snyder, Dr. DeNoble's attorney. Dr. DeNoble's suit is still pending.

In riveting testimony last month, Dr. DeNoble told a Congressional subcommittee that a decade ago his research was suppressed by Philip Morris. He said he was forced to leave the tobacco company after management became concerned that his work on the addictive potential of nicotine would pose a legal liability.

Role in Government Probe

Top health officials praised Dr. DeNoble's testimony as "critically important" to the government's investigation into whether the tobacco industry is manipulating nicotine levels to keep smokers addicted.

Philip Morris says Dr. DeNoble has misrepresented his research while at Philip Morris, which the company maintains showed that nicotine isn't addictive. After the April 27 hearing, Philip Morris said in a statement, "That Dr. DeNoble has now conveniently changed his opinions does not change the facts of what his Philip

Morris research showed."

Philip Morris declined to comment on the information about Dr. DeNoble's employment at DuPont. DuPont Merck, a drug development joint venture between DuPont Co. and Merck & Co., declined to comment other than to confirm that Dr. DeNoble worked for the company until 1992.

Research Remains Damaging

Despite his dismissal from DuPont Merck, Dr. DeNoble's testimony on Philip Morris's extensive nicotine research program remains damaging to the tobacco industry. Most of his testimony was confirmed by Dr. Paul C. Mele, another former Philip Morris scientist. The lab, which was disbanded in 1984, was also working on developing a synthetic nicotine that Dr. DeNoble said would be safer for the heart than natural nicotine.

After working at another large drug company, Dr. DeNoble joined DuPont in 1987 as part of drug research team that eventually became part of DuPont Merck Pharmaceutical. Dr. DeNoble was hired as a research scientist to work on projects related to the central nervous system and possible drugs to treat Alzheimer's disease.

In 1992, Dr. DeNoble was fired after questions about his results arose. He then sued the company. In his complaint, Dr. DeNoble said that word of his dismissal for "scientific incompetence" has become well known in the scientific community "and has made it impossible to find another position in the area of scientific research."

Dr. DeNoble is currently a senior behavior analyst for the Community Mental Retardation Program for the state of Delaware.

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