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EPA Says Facts Mean What EPA Wants Them To

EDITOR, TIMES-DISPATCH:

I won't comment on the literary quality of Derrick Jackson's June 29 column, "Judge Jackson Says Tobacco Companies Must Face Truth," but will rely only on the facts. The subject of the column is the lawsuit filed by several tobacco manufacturers, including Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds against the Environmental Protection Agency. They hope to achieve a retraction of the EPA report on environmental tobacco smoke, a/k/a second-hand smoke. The EPA report says second-hand smoke is a Class A carcinogen — the worst classification — and causes cancer in non-smokers.

The arguments against the EPA report are many and very solid, yet Jackson chose to ignore them all.

To be brief: The authors of the report have done a number of very questionable things for which there is no precedent in any other EPA study — or in any other toxicological study anywhere. The data from a number of studies that were based on different methodologies have all been lumped together. That was called, very nicely, "meta-analysis."

Then the cut-off point, the "significance level" — the number used to decide if there is or is not a relationship in the data — was changed from the customary 0.05 to 0.10, only for this study. It is as if, in the last minute of a football game with the ball on the five-yard line, the referee were suddenly to move the goal line 10 yards up the field and declare a touchdown.

I anticipate the comment:

"Well, sweetie, of course you work for Philip Morris..." Indeed, I work for Philip Morris and don't have any qualms about it. If I work for Philip Morris, do I have fewer constitutional rights? Does the company I work for — which is, as far as I know, in a legal business — have fewer rights or less protection under the law?

Jackson must face the truth, too.

BARBU A. DEMIAN.
RICHMOND.

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