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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
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From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health

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Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter of 20 June about the Health Education Council's campaign on passive smoking.

The HEC is, of course, an independent body and must decide on its own programmes and campaigns, taking account of Government priorities. Bearing in mind the current level of public interest in passive or secondary smoking, it is quite understandable that they should choose to have a campaign on that theme. Their campaign which includes radio commercials deals with the social as well as the health aspects of passive smoking.

The Government are advised on scientific matters related to smoking by the Independent Scientific Committee on Smoking and Health, chaired by Sir Peter Froggatt. The Committee considered the question of passive smoking in their third report published in 1983; a copy of the relevant extract is enclosed. It would seem that there is no real conflict between what is said in the HEC publicity material and the assessment made earlier by the ISCSH. Since then a number of other studies have attempted to determine the effects on health of breathing other people's smoke and the Committee will shortly be reviewing the position with a view to updating their statement.

The forthcoming paper in the British Journal of Cancer to which you refer is one of several being examined in detail by the Committee. Its findings are subject to interpretation, but as regards passive smoking and lung cancer, I understand that the results are not inconsistent with those of earlier studies in which positive associations between passive smoking and excess lung cancer were indicated.

*Yours,
Ray*

RAY WHITNEY

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