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no matter what the court decides "the key to the whole thing is that everybody knows all about the hazards of cigarette smoking."

"It is one of the most widely known things in the country, and on that basis, when you put a jury together, there is no sympathy for the smoker," he said. "That really is the cigarette industry's litigation armor."

The cigarette companies welcomed the court's decision to take the case, saying they requested it and hoped the end result would resolve lower court conflicts over the adequacy of their warnings to smokers about health hazards.

Executive News Svc.

See 03/25 1750 Activist seeks to shed light on root of woes

RICHMOND, Va. (UPI) -- Despite popular belief, it's fiction that hard drugs are this country's No. 1 problem, Dick Gregory says. In fact, the civil-rights activist and health advocate said, the effects of caffeine, nicotine and alcohol kill more people annually than do hard drugs.

Those substances, coupled with the violence in this country, have led to devastating consequences for Americans in general and black Americans in particular, said Gregory, who will discuss "Disease and Crime: The 21st Century Genocidal Alliance" at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Hyatt Richmond Hotel.

Of the murders committed in 1990 in the United States, Gregory said, nearly 24 percent were alcohol-related. About 9 percent of the homicides were drug-related, he said.

Gregory said 1,300 Americans die each day from smoking cigarettes.

"That amounts to two jumbo jets with 500-plus people crashing every day, all year round," he told The Richmond News Leader in an interview published Monday.

Health statistics for blacks are even bleaker because they also have to deal with the stress of living in a racist society, Gregory said.

While blacks comprise about 12 percent of the U.S. population, he said, 83 percent of patients getting kidney dialysis are black. Though black men on average smoke half as many cigarettes as white men, Gregory said, their death rates are twice as high.

The answer lies in a belief in God and practicing God-like behavior, he said.

He gave up meat, alcohol and cigarettes years ago and said he noticed immediate changes in his body, including the disappearance of his sinus problems and of an ulcer.

He's also fasted in protest of the Vietnam War and most recently in opposition to the Persian Gulf War. He told the newspaper that he hasn't eaten solid food since Thanksgiving and will continue to fast until all Americans return from the gulf region.

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