

“Cherry is like kindergarten for Copenhagen”ⁱ: Why Canada Needs to Ban the Use of Flavour Additives in Spit Tobacco

Issue

The federal *Tobacco Amendment Act* bans the use of most flavour additives in cigarettes and little cigars. Spit tobacco is currently exempt from the flavour additive ban.

Smokeless tobacco users are 50 times more likely to get oral cancer than non-users.ⁱⁱ On average, half of all people who get oral cancer die within five years.ⁱⁱⁱ

Youth use of spit tobacco is especially problematic in Alberta. Seventeen per cent of Alberta males aged 15 to 19 use smokeless tobacco, which is almost double the national average for that age range.^{iv} Alberta sales of spit tobacco are 39% of overall national sales.^v

In 2006, the National Smokeless Tobacco Company announced that 7 of the top 10 best selling smokeless products were flavoured and boasted that their business had grown thanks to new flavours and pouched oral tobacco.^{vi}

Key Messages

Flavour additives are used to make spit tobacco products more palatable, which encourages youth to experiment with these products.

Internal spit tobacco industry documents confirm the strategic use of flavours such as cherry and a “graduated” approach to nicotine intake to make “easier to use” starter products.

Alberta Health Services literature indicates that spit tobacco users start as early as age 9 or 10.^{vii}

The longer the period of time spit tobacco is used the greater the risk for developing oral cancer making early initiation particularly dangerous.

Removing the spit tobacco exemption from the *Tobacco Amendment Act*, also titled the *Cracking Down on Marketing Aimed at Youth Act* is necessary to prevent more youth from experimenting with and becoming addicted to spit tobacco products.

Background

Spit tobacco^{viii} is a highly addictive and lethal mixture of tobacco, nicotine, sweeteners, abrasives, salts and chemicals. Spit tobacco comes in two basic forms: chew and snuff. Chew is a leafy tobacco sold in pouches. Plug tobacco, which is sold in brick form, is also a form of chew. Snuff is finely ground moist tobacco that is sold in small tins. Some people sniff it, but the more commonly used form is moist snuff, which is held between the cheek and gum.^{ix}

Spit tobacco is sometimes referred to as “smokeless” tobacco, a term created by the tobacco industry to offer a “modern and wholesome connotation”^x for marketing purposes.

Spit tobacco has gone from a product once used predominantly by older men to one used principally by boys and young men^{xi} and consumption of spit tobacco products is on the rise.

The increased use of spit by young males occurred as a new generation of flavored products entered the market,^{xii} masking the taste of tobacco and making these products more palatable for “new users.” As a 14 year old spit tobacco user explains, “Cherry is like kindergarten for Copenhagen.”^{xiii}

The most popular spit tobacco products in Canada are Copenhagen and Skoal; products of the former U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company (UST) that is now owned by Philip Morris U.S.A. Internal UST documents have been made publicly available as a result of litigation in the United States and are posted in the American Legacy Foundation Legacy Tobacco Document Library^{xiv}. These documents provide insight into the company’s strategic use of flavours and a “graduated” approach to nicotine intake to make it “easier to use” starter products.

A 1985 UST document titled *Research Project on Graduation-Based Strategy*^{xv} describes research to “introduce the concept of oral

tobacco.” Skoal Bandits “mint flavor introduces a nice taste” while “allowing some of the tobacco pleasure to get through.”^{xvi} Additional industry research concluded that “a mint flavored smokeless has great potential for success due to its appeal to the indoctrinated smokeless tobacco user.”^{xvii}

Industry documents identify wintergreen flavoured Skoal Bandits as “an entry level product targeted to facilitating a new consumer’s entry into the oral tobacco market”^{xviii} and accurately forecasted the success of the product: “We at UST feel Skoal Bandits properly controlled and merchandised will increase the oral tobacco user base and eventually increase the sales of all our smokeless tobacco brands.”^{xix}

While adding mint to disguise the bitter taste of tobacco was successful, UST recognized that “although the mint flavored Bandits version has many taste advantages in approaching a new market, this flavor can not stand alone for a long period of time in the long range building of an oral market. The mint flavor is not appealing to all consumers and one variety alone will simply not be acceptable to carry us through in many foreign markets. Therefore, a second Skoal Bandits product should be introduced to broaden our introductory base.”^{xx}

Spit tobacco now comes in many flavours, including cherry, peach and berry. The products are sold in innocuous packages using colours that mimic the flavours, which create the appearance of a candy-like product. A UST sales representative statement that “Cherry Skoal is for somebody who likes the taste of candy, if you know what I’m saying”^{xxi} reaffirms the use of flavours as an inducement to spit tobacco use.

In addition to using flavours to attract new users, UST employs a “graduation” strategy to move new users from brands with low nicotine content up to those with higher nicotine content as dependence occurs. The manufacturer

purposefully adjusts the nicotine dose in specific brands to cause and maintain dependence.^{xxii}

UST documents describe that “new users of smokeless tobacco are attracted to the category for a variety of reasons and are most likely to begin with products that are milder tasting, more flavored and/or easier to control in the mouth. After a period of time, there is a natural progression to product switching to brands that are more full-bodied, less flavored, more concentrated tobacco taste than the entry brand.”^{xxiii}

Skoal Bandits Wintergreen is on the “bottom rung of UST’s nicotine ladder.” Skoal Long Cut Cherry is next on the “ladder” with more nicotine than the Skoal Bandits Wintergreen, and a “cherry flavour which makes it seem milder”.^{xxiv} UST documents explain that “Skoal Bandits consumers eventually will graduate to the use of Skoal and Copenhagen.”^{xxv}

In a position description for a “Smokeless Consumer Marketing Representative,” the representative is told to “be aware of the importance of developing new users on a continuing basis and the graduation process.” The position description states that “it is a proven process than new consumers of a mild product (Happy Days Long Cut) graduate up to a more flavourful, longer lasting product (Copenhagen and Skoal).”^{xxvi}

As a former UST sales manager confirms “they talked about graduation all the time—in sales meetings, memos and manuals for the college program. It was a mantra.”^{xxvii}

ⁱFreedman, A. M. (1994, October 26). *Juiced up: How a tobacco giant doctors its snuff brand to boost their kick*. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved October 11, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/voz11b00>.

ⁱⁱCampaign for Tobacco Free Kids, *Smokeless tobacco and kids*. Retrieved October 28, 2009, from <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0003.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱAlberta Health Services. *What is spit tobacco?* Retrieved October 27, 2009, from http://www.aadac.com/87_404.asp.

^{iv}Health Canada. *Canadian tobacco use monitoring survey, 2007*. Ottawa, ON; Author.

UST’s own documents clearly demonstrate the role of flavours in attracting new customers to their products. Spit tobacco is highly addictive, and experimentation with products specifically designed to “appeal to the indoctrinated smokeless tobacco user”^{xxviii} may lead to a lethal addiction. As a former UST chemist has stated “There used to be a saying at UST that there’s a hook in every can. And that hook is nicotine.”^{xxix}

Spit tobacco has over 3,000 chemicals, including 28 known carcinogens. There is no safe form of tobacco. Smokeless tobacco can cause mouth, cheek, throat, and stomach cancer. Smokeless tobacco users are 50 times more likely to get oral cancer than non-users.^{xxx} On average, half of all people who get oral cancer die within five years.^{xxxi}

Alberta Health Services literature indicates that spit tobacco users start as early as age 9 or 10.^{xxxii} The longer the period of time spit tobacco is used the greater the risk for developing oral cancer, making early initiation particularly dangerous.

In 2006, the National Smokeless Tobacco Company announced that 7 of the top 10 best selling smokeless products were flavoured and boasted that their business had grown thanks to new flavours and pouched oral tobacco.^{xxxiii}

Alberta Health Services recommends that the current exemption of spit tobacco from the flavour additive ban in Bill C-32 be removed because, as UST knows, “once a kid’s hooked, he doesn’t leave.”^{xxxiv}

^vHealth Canada data supplied to Alberta Health Services, July 7, 2010.

^{vi}National Smokeless Tobacco Company (2007). Presentation made during the 2007 Convenience U CarWacs conference, March 7 and 8, Toronto. Cited in Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. (2009, June). *Smokeless tobacco: Candy coated carcinogens*. Retrieved from http://www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/2009/smokeless.pdf.

^{vii}Alberta Health Services *What is spit tobacco?* Retrieved November 2, 2009, from http://www.aadac.com/87_404.asp.

^{viii}Spit tobacco is used throughout the text to describe spit, chew and snuff.

^{ix}Alberta Health Services. *What is spit tobacco?* Retrieved October 20, 2009, from http://www.aadac.com/87_404.asp.

^x*The Deposition of Gerald Gilmartin Taken on behalf of the Plaintiff*, New York, New York, May 5, 1986. Retrieved October 20, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/btf21b00>.

^{xi}Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, *Smokeless tobacco and kids*. Retrieved October 20, 2009, from <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0003.pdf>.

^{xii}Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, *Smokeless tobacco and kids*. Retrieved October 20, 2009, from <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0003.pdf>.

^{xiii}Freedman, A. M. (1994, October 16). *Juiced up: How a tobacco giant doctors its snuff brand to boost their kick*. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved October 11, 2009 from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/voz11b00>.

^{xiv}The US Smokeless Tobacco collection includes internal corporate documents from the United States Tobacco Company, the largest manufacturer of moist snuff smokeless tobacco products in the US and producer of the well-known brands: Skoal and Copenhagen. Many of the documents were made available through the Smokeless Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement's provision for public access to company documents.

^{xv}Beetham, S. W. for US Tobacco. (1985, January 3). *Research project on graduation-based strategy*, Retrieved October 11, 2009 from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/usf21b00>.

^{xvi}Beetham, S. W. for US Tobacco. (1985, January 3). *Research project on graduation-based strategy*. Retrieved October 11, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/usf21b00>.

^{xvii}Glasscox, R. M. for US Tobacco. (1984, November 15). *Company 1st quarter 1985 : Issues and objectives*. Retrieved October 28, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/mfc46b00>.

^{xviii}US Smokeless Tobacco Collection. *Skoal Bandits*. Retrieved October 11, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/xqz71b00>.

^{xix}US Smokeless Tobacco Collection. *Skoal Bandits. US Smokeless Tobacco collection*. Retrieved October 11, 2009 from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/xqz71b00>.

^{xx}Beetham, S. W. for US Tobacco. (1985, January 3). *Research project on graduation-based strategy*. Retrieved October 11, 2009 from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/usf21b00>.

^{xxi}Bob Beets, sales representative at US Smokeless Tobacco Company, as reported in the National Drug Strategy Network. (1994, November). *New questions about snuff tobacco industry*. Retrieved October 28, 2009, from <http://www.ndsn.org/nov94/snuff.html>.

^{xxii}Connolly, G. N., American Public Health Association (1994, March 25). *Testimony Before the United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on Health and the Environment on Regulation of Nicotine-Containing Tobacco Products under the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (FDCA)*. Retrieved October 15, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/soh21b00>.

^{xxiii}David Weiss Associates. (1984, November 16). *The "graduation theory"*. Retrieved October 12, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/lfc46b00>.

^{xxiv}US Smokeless Tobacco Collection. *Climbing the ladder to more potent snuff*. Retrieved October 11, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/hpz11b00>.

^{xxv}US Smokeless Tobacco Collection. *Skoal Bandits*. Retrieved October 11, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/xqz71b00>.

^{xxvi}US Tobacco Company. *Smokeless Consumer Marketing Representative* [job description]. Retrieved August 6, 2009 from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/kwg45b00>.

^{xxvii}Statement by former UST Manager Ken Carlsen, *Climbing the ladder to more potent snuff*. US Smokeless Tobacco Collection. Retrieved October 11, 2009 from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/hpz11b00>.

^{xxviii}Glasscox, R. M. for US Tobacco Company (1985, November 15). *1st quarter 1985: Issues and objectives*. Retrieved October 28, 2009 from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/mfc46b00>.

^{xxix}Freedman, A. M. (1994, October 16). *Juiced up: How a tobacco giant doctors its snuff brand to boost their kick*. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved October 11, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/voz11b00>.

^{xxx}Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, *Smokeless tobacco and kids*. Retrieved October 28, 2009, from <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0003.pdf>.

^{xxxi}Alberta Health Services. *What is spit tobacco?* Retrieved October 27, 2009, from http://www.aadac.com/87_404.asp.

^{xxxii}Alberta Health Services *What is spit tobacco?* Retrieved November 2, 2009, from http://www.aadac.com/87_404.asp.

^{xxxiii}National Smokeless Tobacco Company (2007). Presentation made during Convenience U CarWacs, March 7 and 8, Toronto. Cited in Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. (2009, June) *Smokeless tobacco: Candy coated carcinogens*. Retrieved from http://www.smoke-free.ca/pdf_1/2009/smokeless.pdf

^{xxxiv}Glover E. D., Christen A. G., Duffin A. H. *Smokeless tobacco: Seduction of youth*. The Tobacco Institute; Texas Christian University; Indiana University. Retrieved October 12, 2009, from <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/qnh21b00>.

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