

How Big Tobacco Helped Create "the Junkman"

by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

In the biographical sketch that accompanies "The Fear Profiteers" (see cover story of this issue), Steven Milloy describes himself as the publisher of the [Junk Science Home Page](#) and an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute. "Milloy appears frequently on radio and television; has testified on risk assessment and Superfund before the U.S. Congress; and has lectured before numerous organizations," it adds, noting that he has also "written articles that have appeared in the *New York Post*, *USA Today*, *Washington Times*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, and the *Investors' Business Daily*."

These facts are all accurate as far they go, but they say nothing about how Milloy came to be a prominent debunker of "junk science." This omission is undoubtedly by design, because it would certainly be embarrassing to admit that a self-proclaimed scientific reformer got his start as a behind-the-scenes lobbyist for the tobacco industry, which has arguably done more to corrupt science than any other industry in history.

Early in his career, Milloy worked for a company called Multinational Business Services, a Washington lobby shop that Philip Morris described as its "primary contact" on the issue of secondhand cigarette smoke in the early 1990s. Later, he became executive director of The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition (TASSC), an organization that was covertly created by Philip Morris for the express purpose of generating scientific controversy regarding the link between secondhand smoke and cancer.

The Whitecoat Project

[whitecoat.gif](#)

[whitecoat.gif](#)One of the forerunners of TASSC at Philip Morris was a 1988 "Proposal for the Whitecoat Project," named after the white laboratory coats that scientists sometimes wear. The project had four goals: "Resist and roll back smoking restrictions. Restore smoker confidence. Reverse scientific and popular misconception that ETS is harmful. Restore social acceptability of smoking."

To achieve these goals, the plan was to first "generate a body of scientific and technical knowledge" through research "undertaken by whitecoats, contract laboratories and commercial organizations"; then "disseminate and exploit such knowledge through specific communication programs." Covington & Burling, PM's law firm, would function as the executive arm of the Whitecoat Project, acting as a "legal buffer . . . the interface with the operating units (whitecoats, laboratories, etc.)."

[net.gif](#)

[net.gif](#)The effort to create a scientific defense for secondhand smoke was only one component in the tobacco industry's multi-million-dollar PR campaign. To defeat cigarette excise taxes, a Philip Morris strategy document outlined plans for "Co-op efforts with third party tax organizations"--libertarian anti-taxation think tanks, such as Americans for Tax Reform, Citizens for a Sound Economy, Citizens for Tax Justice and the Tax Foundation. Other third party allies included the National Journalism Center, the Heartland Institute, the Claremont Institute, and National Empowerment Television, a conservative TV network.

In one memo to Philip Morris CEO Michael A. Miles, vice president Craig L. Fuller noted that he was "working with many third party allies to develop position papers, op-eds and letters to the editor detailing how tobacco is already one of the most heavily regulated products in the marketplace, and derailing arguments against proposed bans on tobacco advertising."

Through the PR firm of Burson-Marsteller, Philip Morris also created the "National Smoker's Alliance," a supposedly independent organization of individual smokers which claimed that bans on smoking in public places infringed on basic American freedoms. The NSA was a "grassroots" version of the third party technique, designed to create the impression of a citizen groundswell against smoking restrictions. Burson-Marsteller spent millions of dollars of tobacco industry money to get the NSA up and running--buying full-page newspaper ads, hiring paid canvassers and telemarketers, setting up a toll-free 800 number, and publishing newsletters and other folksy "grassroots" materials to mobilize the puffing masses.

[empower.gif](#)

[empower.gif](#)The NSA's stated mission was to "empower" smokers to reclaim their rights--although, behind closed

doors, industry executives fretted that they didn't want this rhetoric to go too far. They were well aware of opinion polls showing that 70 percent of all adult smokers wish they could kick the habit. "The issue of 'empowerment of smokers' was viewed as somewhat dangerous," stated a tobacco strategy document. "We don't want to 'empower' them to the point that they'll quit."

Due to the publicity associated with Burson-Marsteller's role in setting up the NSA, Philip Morris executives felt that it was best to select some other PR firm to handle the launch of TASSC. They settled on APCO Associates, a subsidiary of the international advertising and PR firm of GCI/Grey Associates, which agreed to "organize coalition efforts to provide information with respect to the ETS issues to the media and to public officials" in exchange for a monthly retainer of \$37,500 plus expenses.

The purpose of TASSC, as described in a memo from APCO's Tom Hockaday and Neal Cohen, was to "link the tobacco issue with other more 'politically correct' products"--in other words, to make the case that efforts to regulate tobacco were based on the same "junk science" as efforts to regulate food additives, automobile emissions and other industrial products that had not yet achieved tobacco's pariah status.

"The credibility of EPA is defeatable, but not on the basis of ETS alone," stated a Philip Morris strategy document. "It must be part of a larger mosaic that concentrates all of the EPA's enemies against it at one time."

Originally dubbed the "Restoring Integrity to Science Coalition," the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition was later renamed to resemble the venerable American Association for the Advancement of Science. After APCO's planners realized that the resulting acronym was not terribly flattering--ASSC, or worse, the ASS Coalition--they began putting a capitalized article "the" at the beginning of the name, and TASSC was born, a "national coalition intended to educate the media, public officials and the public about the dangers of 'junk science.' "

In September 1993, APCO President Margery Kraus sent a memo to Philip Morris Communications Director Vic Han. "We look forward to the successful launching of TASSC this fall," she stated. "We believe the groundwork we conduct to complete the launch will enable TASSC to expand and assist Philip Morris in its efforts with issues in targeted states in 1994."

APCO's work would focus on expanding TASSC's membership, finding outside money to help conceal the role of Philip Morris as its primary funder, compiling a litany of "additional examples of unsound science," and "coordinating and directing outreach to the scientific and academic communities."

APCO would also direct and manage former New Mexico governor Garrey Carruthers, who had been hired as TASSC's spokesman. "This includes developing and maintaining his schedule, prioritizing his time and energies, and briefing Carruthers and other appropriate TASSC representatives," Kraus wrote, outlining a "comprehensive media relations strategy" designed to "maximize the use of TASSC and its members into Philip Morris's issues in targeted states. . . . This includes using TASSC as a tool in targeted legislative battles."

[carruthers.gif](#)

[carruthers.gif](#) Planned activities included publishing a monthly newsletter, frequent news releases, drafting "boilerplate" speeches and op-ed pieces to be used by TASSC representatives, and placing articles in various trade publications to help recruit members from the agriculture, chemical, biotechnology and food additive industries. In addition to APCO's monthly fee, \$5,000 per month was budgeted "to compensate Garrey Carruthers."

Considerable effort was expended to conceal the fact that TASSC was created and funded by Philip Morris. APCO recommended that TASSC first be introduced to the public through a "decentralized launch outside the large markets of Washington, DC and New York" in order to "avoid cynical reporters from major media."

**"Increasingly today, one can find examples of junk science that compromise the integrity of the field of science and, at the same time, create a scare environment where unnecessary regulations on industry in general, and on the consumer products industry in particular, are rammed through without respect to rhyme, reason, effect or cause."
--Michael A. Miles, former CEO of the Philip Morris tobacco company**

In smaller markets, APCO reasoned, there would be "less reviewing/challenging of TASSC messages." Also, a decentralized launch would "limit potential for counterattack. The opponents of TASSC tend to concentrate their efforts in top markets while skipping the secondary markets. This approach sends TASSC's message initially into these more receptive markets--and enables us to build upon early successes."

The plan included a barnstorming media tour by Garrey Carruthers of these secondary markets. "APCO will arrange on-the-ground visits with three to four reporters in each city. These interviews, using TASSC's trained spokespeople, third-party allies (e.g., authors of books on unsound science), members of the TASSC Science Board, and/or Governor Carruthers, will be scheduled for a one to two day media tour in each city."

To set up the interviews, APCO used a list of sympathetic reporters provided by John Boltz, a manager of media affairs at Philip Morris. "We thought it best to remove any possible link to PM, thus Boltz is not making the calls," noted Philip Morris public affairs director Jack Lenzi. "With regard to media inquiries to PM about TASSC, I am putting together some Q and A. We will not deny being a corporate member/sponsor, will not specify dollars, and will refer them to the TASSC '800-' number, being manned by David Sheon (APCO)."

Other plans, developed later, included creation of a TASSC internet page that could be used to "broadly distribute published studies/papers favorable to smoking/ETS debate" and "release PM authored papers . . . on ETS science and bad science/bad public policy."

Carruthers began his media tour in December, with stopovers in cities including San Diego, Dallas and Denver. News releases sent out in advance of each stop described TASSC as a "grassroots-based, not-for-profit watchdog group of scientists and representatives from universities, independent organizations and industry, that advocates the use of sound science in the public policy arena." As examples of unsound science, it pointed to the asbestos abatement guidelines, the "dioxin scare" in Times Beach, Missouri, and "unprecedented regulations to limit radon levels in drinking water."

In Texas, local TASSC recruits involved in the launch included Dr. Margaret Maxey and Floy Lilley, both of the University of Texas. "The Clean Air Act is a perfect example of laboratory science being superficially applied to reality," Lilley said. Carruthers took the opportunity to inveigh against politicized uses of science by the Environmental Protection Agency "to make science 'fit' with the political leanings of special interests." EPA's studies, he complained, "are frequently carried out without the benefit of peer review or quality assurance."

[lie.gif](#)

[lie.gif](#)In Denver, Carruthers told a local radio station that the public has been "shafted by shoddy science, and it has cost consumers and government a good deal of money." When asked who was financing TASSC, Carruthers sidestepped the question. "We don't want to be caught being a crusader for a single industry," he said. "We're not out here defending the chemical industry; we're not out here defending the automobile industry, or the petroleum industry, or the tobacco industry; we're here just to ensure that sound science is used."

Virtually every news release made some reference to the so-called "Alar scare," in which consumers mobilized to stop apple growers from using the pesticide Alar. The U.S. EPA has classified Alar as a "probable carcinogen," and subsequent reports from the World Health Organization and the U.S. Public Health Service had concurred with that judgment. Pro-industry groups continue to defend the chemical, however, as does former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.

In its news releases, TASSC made a point of invoking Koop's name whenever possible. In an "advertorial" titled "Science: A Tool, Not a Weapon," TASSC noted that "respected experts, including then-Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, said the scientific evidence showed no likelihood of harm from Alar. . . . This is not an isolated case of bad science being used by policymakers," it added. "It's happened regarding asbestos, dioxin and toxic waste. . . . It's happening in the debate over environmental tobacco smoke, or second-hand smoke. The studies done so far on the topic do not demonstrate evidence that second-hand smoke causes cancer, even though that is the popular wisdom." To the casual reader, it would almost appear as if Dr. Koop were a defender of environmental tobacco smoke, rather than one of its most prominent public critics.

EuroTASSC

[tassc_budget.gif](#)

[tassc_budget.gif](#)In 1994, Philip Morris budgeted \$880,000 in funding for TASSC. In consultation with APCO and Burson-Marsteller, the company began planning to set up a second, European organization, tentatively named "Scientists for Sound Public Policy" (later renamed the European Science and Environment Forum). Like TASSC, the European organization would attempt to smuggle tobacco advocacy into a larger bundle of "sound science" issues, including the "ban on growth hormone for livestock; ban on [genetically-engineered bovine growth hormone]

to improve milk production; pesticide restrictions; ban on indoor smoking; restrictions on use of chlorine; ban on certain pharmaceutical products; restrictions on the use of biotechnology."

The public and policymakers needed to be "educated," Burson-Marsteller explained, because "political decision-makers are vulnerable to activists' emotional appeals and press campaigns. . . . The precautionary principle is now the accepted guideline. Even if a hypothesis is not 100 percent scientifically proven, action should be taken, e.g. global warming."

Companies that B-M thought could be recruited to support the European endeavor would include makers of "consumer products (food, beverages, tobacco), packaging industry, agrichemical industry, chemical industry, pharmaceutical industry, biotech industry, electric power industry, telecommunications."

A turf war broke out between Burson-Marsteller and APCO over the question of which PR firm should handle the European campaign. Jim Lindheim of Burson-Marsteller laid claim to the account by stressing his firm's already-proven expertise at defending tobacco science in Europe. "We have the network, much of which is already sensitized to PM's special needs," he stated. "We have a lot of experience in every country working with scientists. . . . We've got a large client base with 'scientific problems' whom we can tap for sponsorship."

APCO's Margery Kraus responded by reminding Philip Morris regulatory affairs director Matthew Winokur that Burson-Marsteller's long history of tobacco industry work was public knowledge and therefore might taint the endeavor.

"Given the sensitivities of other TASSC activities and a previous decision not to have TASSC work directly with Burson, due to these sensitivities in other TASSC work, I did not feel comfortable having Steig or anyone else from Burson assume primary responsibility for working with TASSC scientists," Kraus stated. As for experience handling "scientific problems," she pointed to her parent company's work for "the following industries impacted by science and environmental policy decisions: chemical, pharmaceutical, nuclear, waste management and motor industries, power generation, biotech products, packaging and detergents, and paint. They have advised clients on a number of issues, including: agricultural manufacturing, animal testing, chlorine, dioxins, toxic waste, ozone/CFCs, power generation, coastal pollution, lead in gasoline, polyurethanes, lubricants."

TASSC was designed to appear outwardly like a broad coalition of scientists from multiple disciplines. The other industries and interests--biotech, chemical, toxic waste, coastal pollution, lubricants--served as protective camouflage, concealing the tobacco money that was at the heart of the endeavor. TASSC signed up support from corporate executives at Santa Fe Pacific Gold Corporation, Procter & Gamble, the Louisiana Chemical Association, the National Pest Control Association, General Motors, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Exxon, W.R. Grace & Co., Amoco, Occidental Petroleum, 3M, Chevron and Dow Chemical.

Many of its numerous news releases attacking "junk science" made no mention of tobacco whatsoever. It objected to government guidelines for asbestos abatement; said the "dioxin scare" in Times Beach, Missouri was a tempest in a teapot; scoffed at the need for an EPA Superfund cleanup in Aspen, Colorado; dismissed reports of health effects related to use of the Norplant contraceptive; denounced the Clean Water Act; and orchestrated a letter-writing campaign to oppose any government action aimed at limiting industrial activities linked to global warming.

Trash Talk With the Junkman

In February 1994, APCO vice president Neal Cohen made the mistake of boasting candidly about some of the sneaky tactics his company uses to set up front groups. His remarks were made at a conference of the Public Affairs Council (PAC), an exclusive association of top-ranking lobbyists and PR people. *New York Times* political reporter Jane Fritsch later used his remarks as the basis for a March 1996 article titled "Sometimes Lobbyists Strive to Keep Public in the Dark."

Shortly after APCO suffered this embarrassment, the responsibility for managing TASSC was quietly transferred to the EOP Group, a well-connected, Washington-based lobby firm whose clients have included the American Crop Protection Association (the chief trade association of the pesticide industry), the American Petroleum Institute, AT&T, the Business Roundtable, the Chlorine Chemistry Council, Dow Chemical Company, Edison Electric Institute (nuclear power), Fort Howard Corp. (a paper manufacturer), International Food Additives Council, Monsanto Co., National Mining Association, and the Nuclear Energy Institute.

In March 1997, EOP lobbyist Steven Milloy, described in a TASSC news release as "a nationally known expert and author on environmental risk and regulatory policy issues," became TASSC's executive director. "Steven brings not only a deep and strong academic and professional background to TASSC, but he brings an equally deep, strong and passionate commitment to the principle of using sound science in making public policy decisions," said Garrey Carruthers. "The issue of junk science has become the topic of network news specials, major articles in newspapers,

and a key topic in Congress and legislatures around the country. I look forward to working with Steven to continue to drive home the need for sound science in public policy making."

Although the news release referred to Milloy's work "over the last six years" on "environmental and regulatory policy issues," it did not mention that he had worked specifically for the tobacco industry.

During 1992 Milloy worked for James Tozzi at Multinational Business Services. Tozzi, a former career bureaucrat at the U.S. Office of Management and Budget who had spearheaded the Reagan-era OMB campaign to gut environmental regulations, is described in internal Philip Morris documents as the company's "primary contact on the EPA/ETS risk assessment during the second half of 1992." During that period, it noted, "Tozzi has been invaluable in executing our Washington efforts including generating technical briefing papers, numerous letters to agencies and media interviews," a service for which Philip Morris paid an estimated \$300,000 in consulting fees. Philip Morris also paid Tozzi's company another \$880,000 to establish a "nonprofit" think-tank called the Institute for Regulatory Policy (IRP). On behalf of Philip Morris, the IRP put together "three different coalitions which support sound science--Coalition for Executive Order, Coalition for Moratorium on Risk Assessments, and Coalition of Cities and States on Environmental Mandates. . . . IRP could work with us as well as APCO in a coordinated manner," PM's Boland and Borelli had noted in February 1993.

After leaving Tozzi's service, Milloy became president of his own organization called the "Regulatory Impact Analysis Project, Inc.," where he wrote a couple of reports arguing that "most environmental risks are so small or indistinguishable that their existence cannot be proven." Shortly thereafter, he launched the "Junk Science Home Page." Calling himself "the Junkman," he offered daily attacks on environmentalists, public health and food safety regulators, anti-nuclear and animal rights activists, and a wide range of other targets that he accused of using unsound science to advance various political agendas.

Milloy was also active in defense of the tobacco industry, particularly in regard to the issue of environmental tobacco smoke. He dismissed the EPA's 1993 report linking secondhand smoke to cancer as "a joke," and when the *British Medical Journal* published its own study with similar results in 1997, he scoffed that "it remains a joke today." After one researcher published a study linking secondhand smoke to cancer, Milloy wrote that she "must have pictures of journal editors in compromising positions with farm animals. How else can you explain her studies seeing the light of day?"

In August 1997, the *New York Times* reported that Milloy was one of the paid speakers at a Miami briefing for foreign reporters sponsored by the British-American Tobacco Company, whose Brown & Williamson unit makes popular cigarettes like Kool, Carlton and Lucky Strike. At the briefing, which was off-limits to U.S. journalists, the company flew in dozens of reporters from countries including Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Peru and paid for their hotel rooms and expensive meals while the reporters sat through presentations that ridiculed "lawsuit-driven societies like the United States" for using "unsound science" to raise questions about "infinitesimal, if not hypothetical, risks" related to inhaling a "whiff" of tobacco smoke.

The Legacy

In 1999, University of Pennsylvania professor Edward S. Herman surveyed 258 articles in mainstream newspapers that used the term "junk science" during the years 1996 through 1998. Only 8 percent of the articles used the term in reference to corporate-manipulated science. By contrast, 62 percent used the term "junk science" in reference to scientific arguments used by environmentalists, other corporate critics, or personal-injury lawyers engaged in suing corporations.

"What's starting to happen is that this term, 'junk science,' is being thrown around all the time," says Lucinda Finley, a law professor from the State University of New York at Buffalo who specializes in product liability and women's health. "People are calling scientists who disagree with them purveyors of 'junk.' But what we're really talking about is a very normal process of scientific disagreement and give-and-take. Calling someone a 'junk scientist' is just a way of shutting them up."

Like other corporate-funded front groups, the organizations that flack for sound science are sometimes fly-by-night organizations. Called into existence for a particular cause or legislative lobby campaign, they often dry up and blow away once the campaign is over. The tendency of groups to appear and disappear creates another form of camouflage, making it difficult for journalists and everyday citizens to sort out the bewildering proliferation of names and acronyms.

This was indeed what happened with The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, which was quietly retired in late 1998. Its legacy, however, continues. Dozens, if not hundreds, of industry-funded organizations and conservative think tanks continue to wave the sound science banner. Milloy's Junk Science Home Page remains

active, claiming sponsorship from "Citizens for the Integrity of Science," about which no further information is publicly available.

The tone of the Junk Science Home Page appears calculated to lower rather than elevate scientific discourse. That tone is particularly notable in its extended attack on *Our Stolen Future*, the book about endocrine-disrupting chemicals by Theo Colborn, Dianne Dumanoski and Peter Myers. Milloy's on-line parody, titled "Our Swollen Future," includes a cartoon depiction of Colborn hauling a wheelbarrow of money to the bank (her implied motive for writing the book), and refers to Dianne Dumanoski as "Dianne Dumb-as-an-oxski."

Casual visitors to Milloy's Junk Science Home Page might be tempted to dismiss him as merely an obnoxious adolescent with a website. They would be surprised to discover that he is a well-connected fixture in conservative Washington policy circles. He currently holds the title of "adjunct scholar" at the libertarian Cato Institute, which was rated the fourth most influential think tank in Washington, DC in a 1999 survey of congressional staffers and journalists.

Milloy is also highly visible on the internet. In addition to publishing the Junk Science Home Page and a website for the No More Scares campaign, Milloy also operates a "Consumer Distorts" website devoted to attacking Consumers Union, the publisher of *Consumer Reports* magazine, which Milloy accuses of socialism, sensationalism, and "scaring consumers away from products."