

“LIGHT” AND “LOW-TAR” CIGARETTES

History of the “light” and “low-tar” fraud in the United States

In response to a growing concern by smokers about the health risks of smoking, the tobacco industry introduced “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes in the late 1960s, in an effort to reassure consumers and encourage health-concerned smokers to switch rather than quit. However, these “light” and “low tar” cigarettes were and remain a fraud.

Smokers’ health concerns begin to grow

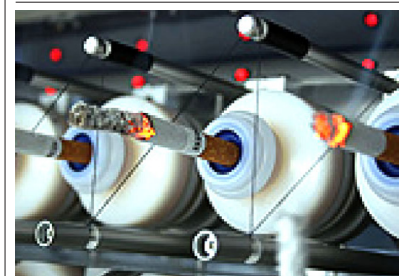
- As early as the 1950s, research established a link between smoking and lung cancer.¹
- By the mid-1960s, scientific evidence firmly established that smoking causes cancer and other serious diseases.^{2,3}
- During the 1960s and 1970s, information on the health risks of smoking became widely publicized, and smokers’ growing health concerns led many to quit smoking or consider quitting.⁴

The tobacco industry introduces “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes

- Fearing a loss in profits from smokers quitting, the tobacco industry saw the need to address the growing health concerns of smokers.
- The industry introduced “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes in the late 1960s⁵, in an effort to reassure consumers and encourage health-concerned smokers to switch rather than quit.¹
- Internal tobacco industry documents spanning several decades demonstrate that the tobacco industry deliberately designed “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes to deceptively produce lower yields of tar and nicotine when tested by smoking machines.⁶
- Internal documents also reveal that the industry knew the machine measurements drastically underestimated how much tar and nicotine smokers actually receive.⁶

Smokers believe “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes reduce health risks

- Smokers’ desire to reduce health risks is a key motivation for using “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes.¹
- Studies have concluded that many smokers of “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes mistakenly believe these cigarettes present less of a health risk than other brands.¹
 - More than 40% of U.S. adults who switched to “low-tar” cigarettes reported they switched to reduce health risks.¹
- Cigarette companies were successful in promoting “low-tar” cigarettes and getting smokers to switch to low-tar brands. Currently the vast majority of cigarettes sold in the United States are “low-tar” according to the machine-measured tar yields.⁷



Machine testing in the 1960s (above) and today (below)

An advertisement for True cigarettes. It features a woman in a white tennis outfit standing on a tennis court. The headline reads: "Considering all I'd heard, I decided to either quit or smoke True. I smoke True." Below the headline, there are two packs of True cigarettes, one labeled "TRUE" and the other "TRUE". At the bottom, it says "The low tar, low nicotine cigarette. Think about it." There is also a small disclaimer at the bottom left: "Surgeon General's Warning: Quitting Now Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Smoking." and a small note at the bottom right: "King Regular: 7 mg. "tar," 0.9 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method. 10 mg. "tar," 1.1 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method. Nic. "tar."

Advertisement enticing smokers to switch to light cigarettes instead of quit. Headline: “Considering all I’d heard, I decided to either quit or smoke True. I smoke True. The low tar, low nicotine cigarette. Think about it.”

“LIGHT” AND “LOW-TAR” CIGARETTES: History

The fraud is finally revealed

- Decades after most smokers switched to “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes, research shows no meaningful reduction in disease or health risks.¹
- Experts believe the use of health claims to market “lights” could worsen the burden of tobacco-related diseases, including lung cancer.⁸
- In 2001, a U.S. National Cancer Institute (NCI) report concluded that “epidemiological and other scientific evidence does not indicate a benefit to public health from changes in cigarette design and manufacturing over the last fifty years.”¹
- The NCI report concluded that the marketing of “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes as delivering less tar and reducing smokers’ health risks is “deceptive”, and the choice of these products by smokers as an alternative to quitting makes this deception an “urgent public health issue.”¹
- On August 17, 2006, U.S. District Judge Gladys Kessler issued a final opinion in the U.S. government’s landmark lawsuit against the major cigarette companies. Judge Kessler found that the companies “falsely marketed and promoted low-tar/light cigarettes as less harmful than full-flavor cigarettes in order to keep people smoking and sustain corporate revenues.”⁶
 - As part of her ruling against the U.S. cigarette companies, Judge Kessler banned the cigarette companies “from using any descriptors indicating lower tar delivery... that convey the false impression that such cigarettes are less harmful.”⁶
 - The companies appealed Judge Kessler’s verdict in 2007. In 2009, the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld Judge Kessler’s final opinions.⁹
 - The U.S. banned misleading terms under the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act effective June 22, 2010.¹⁰
- The U.S. Federal Trade Commission, the entity that developed the machine testing of cigarettes, revoked the current testing method in 2008 because it does not provide any meaningful measurements.¹¹



1. National Cancer Institute. Risks Associated with Smoking Cigarettes with Low Machine-Measured Yields of Tar and Nicotine. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 13. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute; 2001. 2. Royal College of Physicians of London. Smoking and Health: Summary and Report of the Royal College of Physicians of London on Smoking in relation to cancer of the Lung and other Diseases. London: Pitman Publishing; 1962. 3. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Smoking and health. Report of the advisory Committee to the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service. Washington, DC: Public Health Service; 1964, (PHS Publication No. 1103). 4. National Cancer Institute. Changes in Cigarette-Related Disease Risks and Their Implication for Prevention and Control. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 8. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute; 1997. 5. Tindle H, Rigotti NA, Davis RB, Barbeau EM, Kawachi I, Shiffman S. Cessation among smokers who used “light” cigarettes: results from the 2000 National Health Interview Survey. American Journal of Public Health 2006; 96(8):1-7. 6. Judge Kessler Final Opinion. United States v. Philip Morris. Civil Action No. 99-2496 (GK). 2006. Available from www.tobaccolawcenter.org/documents/FinalOpinion.pdf. 7. US Federal Trade Commission (FTC). FTC Cigarette Report for 2004 and 2005. Washington, DC: FTC; 2007. Available from www.ftc.gov/reports/tobacco/2007cigarette2004-2005.pdf. 8. Thun M, Burns D. Health impact of “reduced yield” cigarettes: a critical assessment of the epidemiological evidence. Tob Control. 2001;10 Suppl 1:4-11. 9. US Court of Appeals. Case No. 06-5267. United States v. Philip Morris, BAT, Council for Tobacco Research-USA. [May 22, 2009]. 10. Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, Pub. L. 111-31, 123 Stat. 1776 (2009) 11. Federal Trade Commission. FTC Rescinds Guidance from 1966 on Statements Concerning Tar and Nicotine Yields [press release]. 26 Nov 2008. Available from: <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2008/11/cigarettetesting.shtm>.