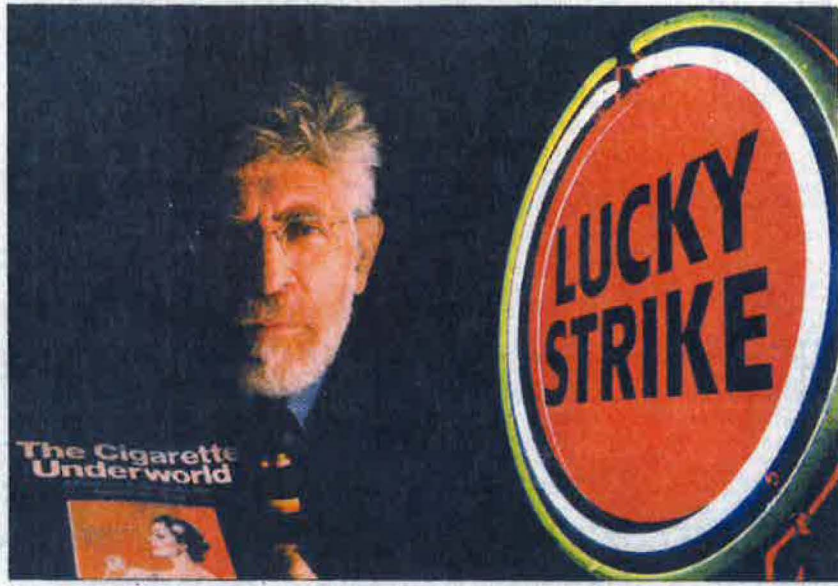


EXPERT OPINION | DR. ALAN BLUM,
Director, Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society at the University of Alabama



NEWS STAFF/JOE SONGER

Dr. Alan Blum is surrounded by documents and artifacts that tell the often bizarre story of tobacco's role in society and its relationship with human health and the health care industry. The items in the huge collection at the University of Alabama's Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society range from the amusing and quaint to the deadly serious.

He holds the smoking gun

Physician directs 'scholarly activism' on the ill effects of tobacco

By **DAVE PARKS**
News staff writer

TUSCALOOSA

Dr. Alan Blum knows where the smoking gun lies in the case of who-knew-what-when in the dispute over tobacco and lung cancer. In fact, there really is a cardboard cutout of a smoking gun among the thousands of documents, tapes and memorabilia composing the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society at the University of Alabama. The gun is an old advertising gimmick for Philip Morris cigarettes. It's the kind of item prized by Blum, the center's director. The gun says something about tobacco, and it carries an unintended, ironic message, like much of the collection. The documents and items range from serious to silly.

Blum's collection includes, counterclockwise from top left, a cigarette box from the Mayo Clinic, a lung ashtray that coughs when a cigarette is placed in it, a promotional "smoking gun" from Philip Morris, candy cigarettes and a ceramic smoking baby toy.

On the serious side are the documents that show how evidence clearly linking smoking and lung cancer was available decades before the American medical establishment publicly affirmed that link.

The archive reaches back more than 20 years. From the 1980s onward — the period during which Blum has been collecting — its level of detail is enormous.

"This is a 30-year daily biopsy of the tobacco industry and its promotion, advertising and marketing, along with the anti-smoking movement," said Blum, who is also a practicing physician and holds the Gerald Leon Wallace endowed chair in family medicine.

Blum has traveled the globe latching onto anything with a tie to tobacco and health. He's attended tobacco conventions and

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stockholder meetings. He's snapped thousands of photos of billboards, cigarette machines and a host of events sponsored by tobacco money. People have also donated thousands of items.

"We went to 42 cigarette-sponsored events in Houston in one year alone," Blum said.

The collection is contained in 2,500 boxes, most of which are in public storage. A small portion of the collection is housed in the basement of Nott Hall. It's not open to the public, but provides assistance to researchers, health officials and universities. "We are considered a resource for the World Health Organization," Blum said.

Books and more

The archive includes the largest collection of books on tobacco — more than 4,000 — at any university, Blum said. The center also has popular magazines, newspapers, old medical journals and historical documents back to 1804.

There are also more than 1,000 video tapes and numerous items such as a vending machine that was used to dispense candy cigarettes to children. "We have a whole section of children's tobacco products," Blum said.

As he amassed his collection, Blum emerged as a nemesis of the tobacco industry. He has testified before Congress, made numerous speeches and debated with tobacco industry officials.

"It hasn't been easy," said Blum, 60. "It's what I call scholarly activism."

Taken as a whole, the collection is not only critical of tobacco, but it also raises questions about the role of medical research in the issue.

The collection includes original copies of the famous 1964 report on tobacco and health from the U.S. surgeon general, the late Dr. Luther Terry, who was from Alabama.

"It's a living document," Blum said, noting that the report, "Smoking and Health," is still used as a source for scholarly work. "This went to every doctor. This is the turning point."

The report was the product of a year of secret meetings by a panel that had been approved by the tobacco industry. Then, tobacco companies disagreed with the panel's findings and insisted that much more research was needed before hampering at \$8 billion-a-year industry that so many people relied upon for their livelihoods.

The only other major entity to dispute the report was the American Medical Association, which had just accepted \$15 million from the tobacco industry to conduct research, Blum said. It's all in the archives, he said, producing documents to support the story.

'We lost 14 years'

It was ridiculous, Blum said. There was sufficient medical evidence by 1939, he said, to make the link between smoking and lung cancer. But anybody who tried to do it was ridiculed and criticized as being alarmist or fanatic. One of the most eminent physicians to endure this type of treatment was Dr. Alton Ochsner, a famous thoracic surgeon who despised smoking because he had to operate on people with lung cancer.

After the surgeon general's report, it took 14 years for the AMA to come out with its own report concluding that smoking is dangerous.

"We lost 14 years," Blum said. "They kept this game going."



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NEWS STAFF/JOE SONGER

A 1950s Philip Morris advertisement from Life Magazine combines motherhood and cigarettes.



NEWS STAFF/JOE SONGER

Newspaper articles in Blum's collection tell of landmark events in the history of tobacco and society.

Blum said funding from the tobacco industry has always been an ethical problem for many medical researchers. "They're doing it today."

Last year, Philip Morris USA gave the University of Virginia a \$25 million gift to fund research. The School of Medicine and the McIntire School of Commerce said they would use the money to study ways to prevent smoking by children and to reduce the harm of smoking. They are also planning to study nicotine addiction.

Blum is unimpressed. "Now they're doing work on making smoking safer," he said.

That's been tried before, Blum said, and it ended up giving people a false sense of safety. That's what the cigarette filter was all about. "The filter is the biggest

fraud ever in the history of smoking," he said. "Filtered cigarettes do not confer any benefit whatsoever."

Blum is also highly suspicious of efforts to bring the cigarette industry under control of the Food and Drug Administration. He has testified before Congress against the legislation, which was written with the assistance of Philip Morris. It's just another ruse, he said, but this time the tobacco industry is co-opting one of the primary government agencies responsible for the nation's health.

"It's the biggest single scandal I've seen in this field, and I've been doing this for 30 years," Blum said.

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