

The Filter Fraud: Debunking the Myth of “Safer” as a Key New Strategy of Tobacco Control

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Transcript of Dr. Blum’s Comments on The Filter Fraud

I'm Dr. Alan Blum, director of the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. In the early 1950s faced with smoker's increasing fear and anxiety about the scientific reports that pointed to cigarette smoking as the leading cause of lung cancer, cigarette makers launched new brands with filter tips that purported to remove any harmful components of tobacco smoke. “So safe, so pure, it's used to filter the air in many hospitals” was the pitch by P. Lorillard for its new Kent Micronite filter, and what was that secret ingredient? Asbestos.

Brown and Williamson's Viceroy brand offered “double-barreled health protection” in ads in the medicine section of *Time* magazine. Most medical journals, including *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* continued to accept cigarette advertisements until well into the 1950s. As a result, lung cancer rates continued to soar for the rest of the century. The 2014 US Surgeon General's Report of the health consequences of smoking reported that the near universal adoption by smokers of filtered cigarettes has not reduced the risk of lung cancer and other diseases. Indeed, smokers who switched to low tar filter cigarettes employed compensatory smoking, whereby they inhale more frequently and deeply to maintain nicotine dosing, and thus increase their exposure to carcinogens and carbon monoxide and other poisonous gases. Although the US and several other nations have banned the use of misleading descriptors like “low tar”, “lights”, and “mild” from cigarette advertising, banning the cigarette filter has been overlooked as a strategy to reduce tobacco consumption. Moreover, as my colleague, Dr. Tom Novotny will now discuss the non-biodegradable filter is a source of significant environmental waste.