

Panel says smokers deluded by low-tar, low-nicotine claims

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
Associated Press Writer

BETHESDA, Md. — Smokers are being deceived by advertising into thinking low-tar, low-nicotine brands are less dangerous, according to a federal panel that urged the government to revamp cigarette warnings.

The health benefit "of switching to low-tar and nicotine cigarettes is minimal compared to quitting entirely," said Dr. Harold Freeman of the President's Cancer Panel, who headed the special committee. "How you smoke is much more important than what you smoke."

Cigarette packages should disclose the maximum amounts of tar and nicotine that smokers can absorb simply by taking longer, deeper pulls, the panel convened by the National Cancer Institute recommended on Tuesday.

Cigarettes also should list the carcinogens they contain, much as foods list all their ingredients, and add a disclaimer that "light" brands aren't really more healthful, the panel said.

"In the same way you can see what's in your morning cereal, you can now see what's in cigarettes," said panel member Dr. Jack Henningfield of the National Institutes of Health. "It won't make smokers run out and quit but at least they'll have honest information now."

The Federal Trade Commission is investigating complaints that FTC-designed testing of tar and nicotine, performed by a machine that "smokes" very differently than people do, provides deceptive information implying low-yield brands are less threatening. It pledged to quickly review the recommendations.

But the FTC has jurisdiction only over false advertising of cigarettes, not health claims, and the tobacco industry said congressional action would be necessary to implement many of the changes.

"Some of those recommenda-

tions might be put in place by the FTC without congressional action," responded Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., who requested the panel's study. "I certainly would be willing to work on legislation to make sure consumers have the full information they ought to about the dangers from cigarette smoking."

But now that Waxman's high-profile tobacco probe is about to be ended by the new Republican Congress, such legislation might fail, he acknowledged.

Tobacco representatives wouldn't say whether they would challenge the recommendations, but noted that federal law prohibits any addition or deletion to health warnings already on cigarettes without congressional approval.

The terms "light" and "ultra light" aren't health claims but descriptions of a cigarette's taste, said the Tobacco Institute's Brennan Dawson.

R.J. Reynolds spokesman Maura Ellis added that the changes could backfire. "If the ranges of nicotine in ultra-light and light brands overlap, a smoker might move up to the higher-yield brand."

But the panel heard two days of evidence that the smokers most concerned about tobacco-caused disease switch to low-tar brands — even though studies show those brands lower the risk of lung cancer only slightly and have no effect on heart or other lung diseases.

"We want to be sure that smokers understand smoking cigarettes labeled 'light' or 'ultra light' doesn't protect them from the health effects of smoking," said Dr. Saul Shiffman of the University of Pittsburgh.

And experts said few smokers have ever heard of the three dozen known carcinogens in cigarette smoke such as cyanide, formaldehyde and benzene, chemicals which the panel wants listed on each cigarette pack.

Welfare reform

Study: Requiring jobs will strain child-care system

By JENNIFER DIXON
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Requiring more low-income mothers to get jobs will throw thousands of children into a child-care system that is out of the reach of government health and safety regulators, congressional investigators say.

The General Accounting Office, the congressional watchdog agency, said welfare reform is expected to increase demand for family child care — care that is provided in the home of someone not related to the child, such as a neighbor or friend.

Unlike many child-care centers in office buildings, schools and churches, family day-care centers are small, offer flexible and evening hours and accept infants and toddlers, which makes them attractive to mothers of young children and women who work shifts.

Most family day-care centers, however, escape regulation by state or local authorities and the quality is uneven, the GAO said in a draft report obtained by The Associated Press.

The GAO is expected to release the final version of its study Friday in Portland, Ore., at a hearing of the House Small Business subcommittee on regu-

lation.

Rep. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., the subcommittee chairman, said smaller operators — home-based providers who are caring for six to 10 children — account for a very large share of all non-family child care.

In an interview this week, Wyden said this type of care is "more and more, the child-care system of choice for thousands and thousands of families across the country."

While some states are working hard to make these centers safe and nurturing for young children, he said, "there are parts of the system that are breaking at best."

The GAO said some studies estimate that up to 90 percent of family child care is unregulated.

Hence, many family child-care providers operate legally but do not have to meet any standards to protect the children's safety and health, the investigators said. Experts believe that meeting at least some minimal child-care standards as a precondition to providing care is an important step in building quality into all child care settings.

The issue is especially critical for low-income children, because quality child care can help them overcome some of the shortcom-

ings in their lives, such as poor nutrition or a lack of parenting skills. Child care is important to all aspects of a child's development — physical, cognitive, emotional and social, the GAO said.

Although Republicans and Democrats disagree on many of the specifics of welfare reform, both sides agree that the welfare system must be changed to encourage work and require more mothers to get jobs. The GAO said that will increase the strain on the child-care system, particularly family day care.

Quality child care, the GAO said, is care that nurtures children in a stimulating environment, safe from harm. Elements of good care are associated with child-care providers who are trained in areas such as early childhood development, nutrition, first aid and child health; low staff turnover; small groups; and low child-to-staff ratios; appropriate materials for

each age group; space that is safe and free from hazards; and settings that are regulated.

Wyden said questionable child-care operators tend to gravitate to centers that are not regulated.

"There is a lot of good family child care, but if you're talking about an unregulated environment, an environment that in many communities lacks even minimal kinds of standards, registration and inspection, it's an invitation to the questionable operators to set up shop," said Wyden.

Earlier this year, Wyden's subcommittee investigated health and safety problems at regulated child-care centers.

For some children, Wyden said, poor child care can lead to school problems that spiral into a variety of dangerous directions — gangs, drugs, sexual promiscuity. "If kids get off to a bad start in the first three to four years, society has to play a lot of catch-up ball."

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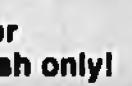
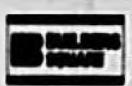
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Saturday, December 10, 1994
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• Christmas Parade - 3:00 PM

ENTERTAINMENT
4:30 into evening on 2 stages at Magnolia Sq.
Music - Dance - Theatre - Talent Pageant

• SNOW - TONS OF SNOW -
Enjoy Winter Wonderland by making a snowman or throwing snowballs at Magnolia Sq. after parade.

• SANTA'S TREE FARM -
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