


# Channel 4 Dispatches - The Secrets of Big Tobacco: Has Philip Morris Really Given Up Smoking?

 [channel4.com/press/news/channel-4-dispatches-secrets-big-tobacco-has-philip-morris-really-given-smoking](https://www.channel4.com/press/news/channel-4-dispatches-secrets-big-tobacco-has-philip-morris-really-given-smoking)

24 February 2020

**CHANNEL 4 DISPATCHES**

**MONDAY 24TH FEBRUARY 2020, 8PM, CHANNEL 4**

Over a decade has passed since major tobacco companies were found to have misled the public over the dangers of smoking. In 2008, Philip Morris International – or PMI - was spun off from one of those firms into a new company, headquartered in Switzerland. Now PMI says it wants to deliver a smoke free future. Considering the controversial history of Big Tobacco, can this campaign be trusted?

Dispatches, in a joint investigation with the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, examines PMI's attempts to promote so called 'reduced risk' products 'in the UK, whilst it ships hundreds of billions of cigarettes across the world.

- Dispatches and The Guardian newspaper have seen internal Philip Morris International (PMI) documents from 2018 which show it putting in practice plans to influence public health policy in the UK and discussions with a then un-named MP.
- Previously leaked PMI internal documents from 2014 detail attempts to “normalize” the brand and *to establish the company as a “trusted and indispensable partner.”*
- An expert indicates PMI's 'heat not burn' product, IQOS, still produces some of the same toxic compounds as cigarettes, but in less quantity. PMI say “the levels of harmful chemicals are significantly reduced” in IQOS.
- Dispatches found that despite taking a smoke-free stance in countries like the UK and USA, PMI continues to promote smoking in other countries such as Indonesia where its affiliate Sampoerna is a market leader.

Dispatches and The Guardian newspaper have seen internal Philip Morris International (PMI) documents from 2018 which show it putting in practice plans to influence public health policy in the UK. These documents reveal a plan to propose to the government the establishment of a £1 billion fund – financed by tobacco companies – “to support a smoke free UK.”

PMI would also seek “repeal [of] parts of the... Tobacco and Related Products Regulations [for] e-cigarettes... including... the limits on the amount of nicotine allowed ... and advertising restrictions.” The documents also propose the creation of a new category of ‘Considerably less harmful Novel Smokeless tobacco products’. This would incorporate heated tobacco products, apparently freeing them from some of the marketing constraints that apply to cigarettes. One of the main beneficiaries of this could be PMI's IQOS.

In Britain campaigners are concerned PMI will succeed in using reduced risk products to normalise and detoxify its brand.

**Deborah Arnott, Chief Executive, public health charity ASH (Action on Smoking and Health):**

*"I mean they're absolutely extraordinary because basically what they've done is stolen our idea, of a polluter pays levy on tobacco manufacturers to fund the end of smoking but buried within this proposal is a sort of poisoned pill where they get what they want out of it, which is relaxation of the advertising rules. It's a trade-off and they want to have a seat at the table in developing the policy and oversight of the spend and that's completely unacceptable. It's all about switching smokers to alternative products so it feeds their market ambitions and not ours which is to end smoking properly."*

An email accompanying the documents made reference to discussions with an unnamed MP. Just a few months later former Labour MP Kevin Barron unsuccessfully put forward a bill containing many of the same proposals. He urged the government to cooperate with the tobacco industry.

**Deborah Arnott:**

*"Kevin Barron the MP who tabled that 10 Minute rule bill, has a very long and respectable history in fighting smoking, but I think there are questions to be asked about how it's so similar how that came to be."*

Sir Kevin Barron told Dispatches: *"I have supported tobacco control for many decades and have been involved in almost every piece of legislation that has restricted the use of cigarettes. Despite these steps we still have nearly 80,000 people dying in the UK from smoking every year. As an MP I was always very clear that I would work with any person or company who is providing a product that will help to reduce that number. Tobacco companies created this problem and should be responsible for the costs of trying to alleviate the issue"*.

Previously leaked internal documents from 2014 also revealed Philip Morris International (PMI) was seeking to detoxify its brand through a policy of "normalization" – "to establish PMI as a trusted and indispensable partner."

Last year PMI launched its Unsmoke Your Life campaign, in which it encourages non-smokers not to start, smokers to quit and for those who can't quit, to switch to an alternative. The alternatives available, in the form of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products are available from PMI.

**Deborah Arnott:**

*"Philip Morris says it wants to end smoking, but it only wants to do it by establishing a replacement market because otherwise basically its business comes to an end. They say they only want to sell these replacements products to smokers ... but if we genuinely end smoking*

*then they're going to have to start selling these replacement products to non-smokers, erm because otherwise they'll go bust."*

In conventional cigarettes it is the burning of tobacco that produces the vast majority of harmful chemicals. The presence of tobacco makes heated tobacco products – like PMI's IQOS – different from e-cigarettes. But PMI claims that by heating, rather than igniting the tobacco, IQOS releases not smoke, but what they call aerosol and "the levels of harmful chemicals are significantly reduced."

**Professor Reto Auer, a clinical researcher at the University of Lausanne:**

*"We compared what comes out of the IQOS and of a conventional cigarette. There were the same toxic compounds, in less quantity in the IQOS. However, it was the same toxic compounds."*

Prof Auer believes more independent research needs to be done into the health consequences of IQOS.

PMI took the unusual step of writing to Prof Auer and his employers.

The letter includes the following passage: *"We respectfully request that you instruct the authors to urgently retract the inaccurate and damaging Research Letter and re-conduct the study at an accredited laboratory using validated methods."* PMI insist that they would have had no role in his research save for offering to reimburse the cost, should he so wish. Mr Auer declined.

**Prof Auer:**

*"So, what they recommend is basically that we work with them, right? So, you can, you can do independent research as long as you use our method and you make sure you interpret it our way."*

Public health bodies in the US and UK have said that some of Prof Auer's methodology was not adequate for their purposes.

However, in a review for parliament, Public Health England said: *"...The available evidence suggests heated tobacco products may be considerably less harmful than tobacco cigarettes and more harmful than e-cigarettes."*

**Prof Auer:**

*"You ought to ask Philip Morris why they're not investing more in e-cigarettes, because it looks like e-cigarettes are safer than the IQOS. You don't make much money with the e-cigarette. With these IQOS in Switzerland its taxed way less than a conventional cigarette, but it's sold the same price. So, I don't need a PhD in Economics to understand that this is pretty interesting for the tobacco industry."*

*In response to the question - "Why does Philip Morris focus on IQOS?"*

**Deborah Arnott** says: *"Profitability ... Vaping is a much more competitive market ... IQOS will be much more profitable. It's put billions into development of IQOS to make sure that it can't be easily counterfeited and that it replicates the smoking experience and that it can be sold at a level that means that they can make the same excessive profits they make on um cigarettes in the longer term."*

PMI told Dispatches *they have been transparent and do not claim that IQOS is risk-free or safe. They say their focus is offering a range of products to help smokers quit: "Philip Morris supports the Government's commitment to make England smoke-free by 2030. To realise this... current smokers need to be persuaded to quit altogether or switch to less harmful alternatives. Critical to this will be... a regulatory framework that ensures smokers have the facts about alternatives and that tobacco companies are pushed to phase out cigarettes... We have made this point time and time again to MPs, civil servants, local councillors, journalists and the broader public. Philip Morris has been consistent in its efforts to make smoke-free 2030 a reality."*

Indonesia is one of the most lucrative markets in the world for PMI and the other big tobacco companies. It's a nation of around a quarter of a billion people where an astonishing 60% of men smoke, and around 20% of all 13-15 year olds, with those figures expected to rise.

PMI's Indonesian affiliate, Sampoerna, advertises at a street level. On a tour of

Bogor City, just south of Jakarta, Margianta Surahman from the anti-tobacco Lentera Anak Foundation shows Dispatches presenter Jane Moore that there is advertising near schools

Margianta and Jane also meet with a local shop owner who has advertising for the Sampoerna cigarette brand A Mild in front of her property.

### **Margianta Surahman:**

*"That slogan says, 'the others are like this and I'm like this'. It's a subtle message that when you smoke, you're different from the others, you're cooler. If Philip Morris is really aiming for a smoke free world and trying to stop people from you know smoking cigarettes, then do not advertise, you know, in front of schools like that."*

Speaking with the shop owner:

Jane: *"So obviously we've come in because of the banner and then I can see lots of other banners and posters. Could you ask her is she paid to put these banners up or is it just her choice?"*

Margianta: *"So she got around I think £20, so £20 for every month and then it's also directly from Sampoerna which is Philip Morris International."*

Jane: *"OK and this banner here looks quite new. When was it put up this particular one?"*

Margianta: "Two weeks ago."

Jane: "So that's not the action of somebody that rowing back on advertising cigarettes."

Margianta: "No"

Most countries in the world are signed up to strict international conventions that restrict tobacco companies from getting involved in public health policy. But Indonesia is one of just nine countries in the world that hasn't signed up.

While in Indonesia Jane also met with Mouhamad Bigwanto, a Jakarta based academic who conducted a study of lobbying by Philip Morris International affiliate, Sampoerna, and other tobacco firms.

When asked if Sampoerna are a friend or enemy in the battle against smoking:

**Mouhamad Bigwanto, University of Muhammadiyah:**

*"Actually, they are the enemy in the battle of the smoking. We have the highest rates of smokers among males in the world and the very fundamental thing is we do not have any regulations to protect our tobacco control regulations from the interference of the industry."*

Last year the Indonesian government introduced a 23% hike in tobacco tax – a measure it perhaps would be expected that a PMI affiliate would support if it wants to end smoking. However, it was reported that Sampoerna said this would "disrupt the tobacco ecosystem".

**Mouhamad Bigwanto:**

*"They're pushing the retailers to sell their brand more and more and more. When they sell more, they can produce more so you can see that there is no intention for them to stop or to end smoking Indonesia. It's business as usual."*

Philip Morris International told Dispatches that they want smoke-free products to replace cigarettes and that:

*"Globally, PMI is committed to achieving what governments and the public health community challenged us to do: develop a less harmful product. To this end, PMI has invested billions of dollars in science and technology to achieve that precise objective. If people who smoke are denied accurate information—or worse yet, are deceived--about less harmful alternatives, the vast majority will simply continue to smoke cigarettes."*

They said their cigarette revenues are being used to fund a rapid transition away from cigarettes and the sooner that happens, the sooner they can stop making them.

As to Indonesia PMI say their advertising is aimed at legal aged smokers and marketing and placement of adverts complies with regulations.

**ENDS**

The Secrets of Big Tobacco: Has Philip Morris Really Given Up Smoking?

Reporter: Jane Moore

Producer Director: Richard Sanders

Executive Producers: George Waldrum

ITN Productions

**For further information, please contact:**

Samantha Fraser

Channel 4 Factual Publicity Manager

[sfraser@channel4.co.uk](mailto:sfraser@channel4.co.uk) / 020 7306 3769 / 07720 497 399

# Philip Morris drew up plan for £1bn tobacco transition fund

[theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/24/philip-morris-drew-up-plan-for-1bn-tobacco-transition-fund](https://theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/24/philip-morris-drew-up-plan-for-1bn-tobacco-transition-fund)

Sarah Boseley

February 24,  
2020

Philip Morris International (PMI), one of the world's biggest tobacco companies, drew up plans for a £1bn tobacco transition fund in the UK to be spent by local authorities and Public Health England on persuading smokers to give up cigarettes in favour of alternatives such as its "heat not burn" smokeless tobacco product, IQOS, leaked documents reveal.

The documents, obtained by the Guardian and Channel 4's Dispatches programme, show PMI had discussions with a leading anti-tobacco MP about presenting a smoke-free bill proposing the fund to the House of Commons. **If passed, the bill would have ended an advertising and marketing ban on IQOS and e-cigarettes.**



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/rilQ4KtKGtU>

Play Video ▶

7:55

▲ We're quitting smoking, so why is big tobacco booming? - video

**PMI wants to be seen as part of the solution** to smoking, which kills half of all people who take it up, even though the company continues to make and market cigarettes around the world. Deborah Arnott, chief executive of Action on Smoking and Health (Ash), said this approach was "breathhtakingly hypocritical".

PMI has declared it is committed to working for a “smoke-free future” in which products such as IQOS, which heats tobacco to deliver nicotine without the smoke and tar that cause diseases including cancer, replace cigarettes. When the Food and Drug Administration in the United States licensed IQOS there, it said the high nicotine hit it delivered could make it an attractive alternative to cigarettes for smokers, but there was a risk of creating addiction in non-smokers.

Ash has advocated a “polluter pays” fund for smoking cessation services, but not one that transitions people on to other addictive tobacco products. Arnott said PMI was seeking to buy respectability, access to government and a role in smoking policy that the industry at the moment is categorically denied.

“This is completely unacceptable,” said Arnott. “The tobacco industry is the most profitable consumer business on the planet, selling products which kill 7 million people a year globally and nearly 100,000 in the UK alone. The industry can afford to pay and it should be made to pay, not allowed a seat at the government policymaking table so it can ensure the fund is used to further the interests of its shareholders rather than public health.”

The MP who met PMI was Labour’s Kevin Barron, now retired, who has an exemplary record in combating smoking and is credited with getting the bill that banned smoking in public places through parliament. Barron said he believed e-cigarettes and other nicotine-delivery devices that were less harmful than cigarettes had an important part to play and he had no qualms in meeting companies that wanted to go in that direction.

The internal documents – an email and two briefing papers – are dated March and May 2018. An email from Mark MacGregor, PMI’s corporate affairs director and a former chief executive of the Conservative party, said an exploratory conversation with the MP had been extremely positive. “He understands the concept of the ‘deal’ that is on offer and is very attracted to the incentive that the fund could provide to change behaviours among smokers and the industry – though balanced by enabling industry to inform smokers,” it said.

That would have meant the removal of advertising restrictions. PMI proposed the setting up of a £1bn fund over 10 years from 2021 in exchange for the loosening of laws curbing advertising of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products. The money was to come from all the major tobacco companies with products on the market in the UK.

The documents show that the bill, if passed, would have rewritten the rules on e-cigarettes after the UK’s exit from the EU. A European directive dictates the size and strength of nicotine liquids in e-cigarettes, which has, for instance, resulted in Juul devices popular with young people containing only 20mg of nicotine instead of 59mg in the USA, so that they are less addictive. That restriction would go, as would limits on packaging and advertising. The relevant parts of the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016, which enshrined the EU rules in UK law, would be repealed, “enabling adult smokers to make informed decisions”, the document says.



PMI envisaged that IQOS would be redefined as a “considerably less harmful novel smokeless tobacco product” (CLHTP). Such products would have lighter regulation and would be promoted to people who cannot stop smoking and do not switch to e-cigarettes, says the document. “Publicly funded public health communications and anti-smoking campaigns, as well as professional health advice such as Nice guidance, must include advice on e-cigarettes and CLHTPs,” says PMI’s draft bill.

The money from the fund would mostly go to local authorities, which are responsible for smoking cessation programmes. Public Health England would get £15m “to facilitate switching” from cigarettes to IQOS, and would have to “report annually on its efforts and achievements in improving the scientific knowledge base and consumer understanding of non-combustible alternatives”.

Barron introduced a 10-minute-rule bill to the Commons on 30 October 2018 that proposed the tobacco transition fund. He had met PMI earlier in the year, has had discussions with other tobacco companies, and maintains it was the right thing to do. He said the issue was simple: smoking kills 50% of users and more than 200 people a day. Tobacco companies are now promoting and selling products that are **up to 95% safer** and **satisfy** people’s addiction. “Shouldn’t we be encouraging them to do that?” he asked.

He said companies must not be able to stipulate that their specific products must be used. “You cannot buy the market, although they have money,” he said. “But if they want to promote a safer, less harmful product for somebody who is addicted to nicotine, my view is we should help them to do that because it will lessen the deaths from combustible tobacco. So I did the 10-minute-rule bill. I spoke to ministers and said this was what it was about. I don’t think the discussions were completely hostile.”

The bill, competing with 149 others, was not adopted. Ash worries that in the post-Brexit world, the EU’s tight regulations over e-cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products could be lifted with the sort of consequences that occurred in the US when Juul took off among teens.

Arnott said: “Ash has worked with Kevin Barron for decades. He led the campaign in parliament to ban tobacco advertising and it’s thanks to his work that pubs are now smoke-free. If, as it looks like, PMI persuaded Kevin Barron of the need for government to partner with the industry, their ‘normalisation’ strategy is clearly working.

“Kevin may have left parliament, but PMI’s parliamentary and public relations campaign continues. Now the government has committed to considering the ‘polluter pays’ approach, PMI will be lobbying to ensure it’s structured to suit their commercial interests.”

Philip Morris said it supported the government’s commitment to make England smoke-free by 2030. “To realise this ambition, millions of current smokers need to be persuaded to quit altogether or switch to less harmful alternatives. Critical to this will be putting in

place a regulatory framework that ensures smokers have the facts about alternatives and that tobacco companies are pushed to phase out cigarettes.

“We have made this point time and time again to MPs, civil servants, local councillors, journalists and the broader public. What this story really shows is that Philip Morris has been consistent in its efforts to make smoke-free 2030 a reality.”