

**MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED 00:01 Wednesday, 28 February 2007**

## **Europeans pledge to fight fire with fire safer cigarettes**

A new EU campaign to introduce self-extinguishing cigarettes and help prevent 1,000 deaths and 13m euros of damage caused by smoking-related fires across Europe every year is to be launched today (Wednesday 28 February) in Brussels.

Fire fighters, fire victims and campaigners from across Europe are calling for a new EU standard to ensure that all cigarettes are produced in a way that ensures they usually go out when not being smoked. Known as 'RIP', which stands for 'reduced ignition propensity', the technology is based on a particular design that reduces the cigarette's propensity to burn but makes no difference to the taste of the cigarette.

The 'RIP Alliance' of pressure groups, health organisations and public sector bodies claim that many of these deaths and horrifying injuries could be avoided by tiny adjustments to cigarettes that make them go out if they are left unattended. The cigarettes are already standard in Canada and across much of the United States. Cigarette companies are also preparing for their introduction in Australia but appear reluctant to offer Europeans the same protection.

The Alliance is calling for the Committee set up under the EU General Product Safety Directive to set out an EU standard to ensure that all cigarettes made or sold in the EU are made using RIP technology.

Speaking at the European Parliament to launch a European Pledge for Fire Safer Cigarettes, Arlene McCarthy MEP, Chairwoman of the European Parliament Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection, said today:

*'There is no such thing as a safe cigarette. Certainly, cigarette free homes would make for more effective fire prevention. However, we emphasise that reduced ignition propensity (RIP) cigarettes are far safer than cigarettes currently sold in Europe. They would be an effective, low cost way to reduce fires and fire deaths in Europe'*

Speaking on behalf of the EU RIP Alliance Val Shawcross, Chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, said:

*'Every week cigarettes cause 250 fires in European homes, needlessly killing smokers and non-smokers alike, causing horrifying injuries and putting fire fighters' lives at risk. All that stands between life and pointless death is two wafer thin bands of paper. That's why this Alliance will not rest until the law requires tobacco manufacturers to provide the people of Europe with the same protection from cigarette fires they now get in other parts of the world'*

With a simple and low cost proposal to save thousands of lives, the Alliance might expect to have an easy ride but many health campaigners fear they

have a fight on their hands. Lobbyists working on behalf of Big Tobacco are already at work and the Tobacco industry is seeking to suggest that the standard will not make a difference. The fault, they say lies not with a dangerous product but with careless smokers:

*'There is no such thing as a fire safer cigarette and the simple fact is that careless use and disposal of cigarettes can cause smoking related fires.'*<sup>[i]</sup>

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[i] Tobacco Manufacturers Briefing, TMA January 2007

### **Notes to Editors**

- 1) **The Hearing on Fire Safer Cigarettes will take place on Wednesday 28 February from 12.30pm to 14.00pm at the European Parliament, Altiero Spinelli building, in Room ASP1H1, Rue Wiertz, Brussels.** The event is hosted by Arlene McCarthy MEP, Chairwoman of the European Parliament Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, and the EU RIP Alliance.
- 2) **Media are welcome to attend. Interviews with the speakers and representatives of the sponsoring organisations can be arranged at the end of the Hearing (at 13.50)** through Florence Berteletti, on behalf of the EU RIP Alliance, on 0032 (0)2 238 53 63.
- 3) Created in 2006, The EU RIP Alliance is a new independent and flexible partnership between the Smoke Free Partnership, the European Child Safety Alliance, EuroSafe ([www.childsafetyeurope.org](http://www.childsafetyeurope.org)), the European Older People's Platform ([www.age-platform.org](http://www.age-platform.org)), the European Federation of Nurses Associations ([www.efnweb.eu/version1/en/index.html](http://www.efnweb.eu/version1/en/index.html)), the European Public Health Alliance ([www.epha.org](http://www.epha.org)), Eurocare ([www.eurocare.org](http://www.eurocare.org)), the Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union ([www.pgeu.org](http://www.pgeu.org)), the Health & Environment Alliance ([www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org)), London's European Office ([www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) [www.ash.org.uk](http://www.ash.org.uk) (London).
- 4) Consistent international fire statistics are hard to find but in the UK cigarettes, pipe and cigars are known to be the biggest cause of fire deaths in the home. Other fires are more common but smoking related fires are the most deadly, often taking victims as they sleep.
- 5) Given that it is technologically and economically feasible for cigarettes to meet fire safety standards, the EU RIP Alliance aims to promote in collaboration with other EU organisations such as the European Fire Safety Network, the introduction of reduced ignition propensity based on the same standard as in New York and Canada (ASTM International) E2187.
- 6) ASTM2187 Standard Test Method for Measuring the Ignition Strength of Cigarettes. The test measures the frequency of cigarettes extinguishing when left unattended. It is based on the Cigarette Extinction Test Method developed by the United States National Institute of Standards and Technology. In this test, a lit cigarette is placed on a set number (three, ten or fifteen) of layers of standard laboratory filter paper. The filter paper acts as a heat sink for the burning cigarette. Once the cigarette coal has cooled to a certain temperature, it should self-extinguish. The more layers of filter paper used, the sooner the cigarette should self-extinguish. For each number of layers of filtered paper, the procedure is repeated 40 times. Failure is defined as the cigarette burning its full length. The results are then presented as "percentage full-length burns."

**Statistical Sources**

- *The ASPECT Consortium. Tobacco or Health in the European Union. Past, present and future. European Commission, 2004.*
- *RIP Cigarettes: State of discussion in the EU, 2nd International Conference on Fire "Safer" Cigarettes. Boston, 2006*
- *UK Fire Statistics 2004, Department of Office of National Statistics*
- *ASTM 2187 [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org)*
- *Smokers reactions to Reduced Ignition Propensity cigarettes, O'Connor et al Tob. Control 2006;15;45-49*
- *Tobacco Manufacturers Briefing, TMA January 2007*