

E.T.S., Smoker's rights, and other abominations

Back in the old days, if your office got stuffy or clammy, you would go outside for "a breath of fresh air." Now that many office buildings do not permit smoking inside, if one goes out for that mythical breath of mythical fresh air, the experience is liable to be hazardous to your health.

In case you haven't noticed, whenever you enter or exit many office buildings (including the one I work in), you must wend your way past a coterie of cigarette smokers (Are they the "nicotine challenged" in P.C. parlance?) who puff, cough, and spit as they pollute the air with what the health and environmental bureaucrats call Environmental Tobacco Smoke. As is compulsive among bureaucrats, they have reduced the phrase to the acronym "ETS".

Sometimes as I pass through the trashed air (ETS) to get in or out of office buildings and smell the stink settling onto my clothes, I hear murmured discussions of the perceived indignities to which smokers are subjected and how their "rights" as smokers are being violated.

With my eyes burning from the smoke, I've observed that these people frequently exhibit body language and facial expressions that reveal an awareness of their social stigmatism, a display of guilt and sleaziness not unlike that of the hookers and pimps who hang out around the bars and motels of the Airline Highway.

When I hear someone expounding on her/his "right" to smoke, I respond cheerfully, "I'll respect your right to blow smoke in my face if you respect my right to vomit on your shoes." When I show signs of gagging, they change the subject.

These outdoor office-building smokers with their ETS smog, hacking coughs, and smelly clothes are in marked contrast to the billboards advertising cigarettes. Those schizophrenic signs show beautiful, squeaky-clean, athletic young people with the whitest teeth on Madison Avenue.

They display ecstatic glee and happiness as the message exhorts you to buy cigarettes so that you, too, can be happy and beautiful. If that's true, why the dire warning at the bottom of the sign explaining that your lungs will turn into old burlap if you smoke and your unborn child will come out with a rotted brain?

Not only do the smokers create ETS at the entrances to office buildings, they discard the butts and filters on the sidewalks and landscaped areas, leaving their spoor like elephants in the jungle.

I have a fantasy of some beefy

"enforcer" informing the smokers that they have the option of picking up their filters and butts and throwing them in a trash can or the enforcer will pick them up and stuff them in the smokers' mouths.


Speaking of schizophrenia — or is it hypocrisy? — the much ballyhooed health care plan proposed by the president and her husband is to be paid for in part by taxes on cigarettes. Be sure to get this straight: we'll need more people to smoke more cigarettes so that there will be more tax money to pay for the diseases caused by those cigarettes to those who smoke them, actively and passively.

You will notice that this is referred to as "health care." Not only does it have nothing to do with health, nobody cares either.

Back in the innocent days of the 1950s when doctors advertised cigarettes, we teenagers (who smoked unfiltered Camels and Lucky Strikes) referred to addicted smokers as "weed fiends," an adaptation of "dope fiend," the slang term for a drug addict.


Cigarettes were called "coffin nails," even as the smoke was being inhaled. Somehow we knew even then that constantly filling your lungs with smoke couldn't be the smartest thing to do all your life.

In these days of politically correct speech we probably would run into opposition if we tried to resurrect those fine old epithets, but we should. The "No Smoking" signs would remain inside the buildings, and on the outside would be "Weed Fiends: Keep Your Coffin Nails 500 Feet Away From This Building."




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Cigarette ads used to say, "I'd Walk a Mile for a Camel." Now we have to walk a mile to get away from the Camels. Δ

— Earl Higgins



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