

STOP Tobacco Industry Watchdog exposes Industry Allies that undermine public health

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Close to 100 groups in 27 countries exposed for supporting industry efforts to derail tobacco control



A [new database](#) released by STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products) reveals dozens of groups from around the world aiding the tobacco industry in its considerable efforts to subvert public health policies. These tobacco industry allies act as lobbyists, spokespeople and validators against smoke-free workplace protections, tobacco tax increases, health warnings, and restrictions on youth marketing. They usually claim independence but often have direct financial links to tobacco companies.

STOP investigators verified 92 organizations in 27 countries, with dozens more still under investigation, that promote the industry's agenda while appearing to be independent. The largest concentration of tobacco industry allies in this initial research was in the United States and the United Kingdom, but groups were identified across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, highlighting the global effort to interfere with tobacco control policies.

"Tobacco companies are so untrustworthy that they need other organizations to carry their messages to policy makers and consumers," said Anna Gilmore, Director of the Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath and Partner in STOP. "This new database exposes these relationships so that governments and advocates don't get tricked into believing those messages are credible."

The tobacco industry has a long history of funding pro-business, anti-regulatory issue groups and think tanks to build credibility and influence. STOP researchers profiled allies in [three categories](#) which describe both their level of industry alignment and activity:

- **Front groups:** Organizations that claim independence but are established, funded or controlled by corporate interests. These groups have the strongest alignment with the industry.

Examples: Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (U.S.), International Tobacco Growers Association (Portugal)

- **Astroturf groups:** A specific type of front group that recruits real or fake supporters to give the impression of grassroots support for an industry-friendly issue or policy.

Examples: Forest (U.K.)

- **Third Parties:** Organizations that undertake a lobbying or public support role on behalf of tobacco companies yet appear to be independent.

Examples: Americans for Tax Reform (U.S.), Libertad y Desarrollo (Chile), Zambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Zambia)

“Deception is the strategy and working through allies is the tactic,” said Sandra Mullin, Senior Vice President at Vital Strategies and Partner in STOP. “Tobacco companies are desperate to build credibility and will continue to recruit new allies. We urge the global health community to send us names and evidence so we can expose the truth about these organizations.”

“No country is immune to industry interference in health policy, either directly or through these groups,” said Nuntavarn Vichit-Vadakan, Chair at the Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC) and Partner in STOP. “By shining a light on industry allies, governments can be better prepared for their arguments and misinformation.”

“The tobacco industry is the single greatest barrier to reducing disease related to tobacco use,” said Gan Quan, Director of Tobacco Control at The Union and Partner in STOP. “STOP is wholly dedicated to providing information and tools that make it easier to sort the truth from the lies.”