

HRC called out for giving perfect score to Reynolds American

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Herrschaft said that CEI scores are based on corporate policies and practices relating to non-discrimination policies, health insurance policies and domestic partner benefits, as well as corporate actions such as supporting anti-gay organizations or taking positions on legislation that hurts the LGBT community.

The CEI scoring "is not the right information to be looking at," he said, if one is concerned primarily with the health of the LGBT community.

Lee said HRC should be taking into consideration the harm companies cause through other actions outside of legislative and philanthropic arenas. He cited Reynolds' "Project SCUM," or "Sub-Culture Urban Market" plan.

In his letter to HRC, Lee claimed that Reynolds had "planned Project SCUM (that's Sub-Culture Urban Market) to target gay men in the Castro District of San Francisco."

In a written response to several questions posed by *Q-Notes*, Seth Moskowitz, a communications director with Reynolds American, said that Project SCUM was never a finalized or utilized marketing plan.

"It was a proposal in a document from one [of] R.J. Reynolds' sales offices for a marketing program called, Sub Culture Urban Marketing," Moskowitz explained. "This inappropriate and offensive document presented an idea for marketing cigarettes to adult smokers who chose

alternative lifestyles. The proposal was never pursued or put into action."

Moskowitz added, "In 2001, when R.J. Reynolds became aware of this document, the company saw that it used language that was unacceptable, inappropriate, offensive and insulting and the company publicly apologized. The document did not reflect the opinions, policies or practices of the company — in fact, it could not have been more opposed to R.J. Reynolds' operating philosophy and practices.

"This thoughtless document did not, and does not, represent R.J. Reynolds' view of, and respect for, its customers and employees. Rather, the company used the discovery of that document as a catalyst for communicating once again to its employees the management philosophies and practices by which the company is to be run."

While the Project SCUM plan was never put into action, Lee nonetheless feels the company has used advertising to draw in new LGBT customers for Reynolds cigarette brands. "The tobacco industry uses similar strategies of making products more available and more appealing today," he said. "Instead of calling us scum, the industry talks about inclusion, diversity, and responsibility. Either way, the purpose of targeted marketing is getting LGBT youth and adults to start smoking."

Moskowitz admitted that R.J. Reynolds Tobacco, as any other company would, wants LGBT consumers to choose their brands over others. "If the ultimate question is this: does R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company want LGBT adult tobacco consumers to use an R.J. Reynolds brand instead of a competitor's brand — the answer is, yes. The company would like to earn the business of all adults who have made the choice to smoke cigarettes or use tobacco products."

He said that "gay adult tobacco consumers, like the rest of the adult tobacco consuming population, have the same ability and right as the rest of the population to evaluate and make informed decisions about whether or not they want to use tobacco or any other consumer product."

Although the company hasn't run any print advertising in more than a year, Moskowitz said that the company had, in the past, run cigarette advertising in publications like *The Advocate* and *Instinct*. "It would not be appropriate to exclude gay audiences or media from R.J. Reynolds' brand communications," he said.

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and its corporate parent, Reynolds American, adhere to equal opportunity policies in employment and hiring — policies that include sexual orientation and gender-identity.

Moskowitz said the company strives "to

ensure that LGBT employees are treated the same as other employees." In 2002, R.J. Reynolds included LGBT employees and their partners in medical, dental and vision benefits under a domestic partner plan.

Lee is adamant in his opposition to giving undue praise to tobacco companies. "We have to stop the addition to the tobacco industry's flattery and money," he said. "All the tobacco industry's marketing and promotion (including its inclusive policies) do is help sell cigarettes. Tobacco company 'social responsibility' to the LGBT community means a higher body count in Winston-Salem and beyond. It does not mean more rights and less discrimination.

"Smoking in LGBT communities is a social justice issue," he added. "Tobacco is the only legal product that when used correctly leads to disability and death. Our communities smoke considerably more than straight folks, and we thus suffer from earlier death and more disability due to tobacco-related diseases. As a community, we have not faced so many obstacles only to lose our lives early from smoking." ▀

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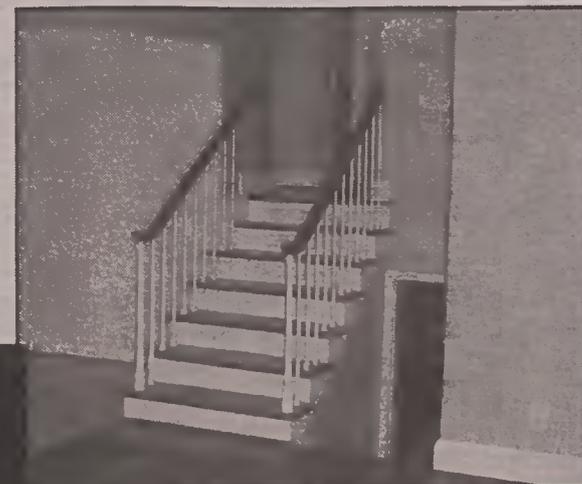
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