

# Anti-Smoking Group Sued Over Worker's Claims of Tobacco Ties

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A former director of social media at an anti-smoking foundation says she was fired for raising concerns that the group's close ties to the tobacco industry and the promotion of teen vaping violated its status as an independent nonprofit organization.

Lourdes Liz, who worked at the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World from February 2018 until February 2020, says she was terminated after objecting to activities "designed to increase the profits of and to do the bidding of" Philip Morris International Inc. and Altria Group Inc. such as promoting the use of vaping among adolescents and teenagers and downplaying the health risks. Liz is seeking unspecified compensatory and punitive damages along with lost wages.

"The foundation tries to portray itself as an independent organization attempting to reduce the consumption of products produced by Big Tobacco," Liz said in her lawsuit, which was filed in federal court in New York on Wednesday. "This, however, is a mere smoke screen, and the foundation has become well known as a tool of PMI and Altria used to peddle its products (particularly vaping products) and push its message from behind a facade of seemingly respectable, supposedly independent science and public health research and policy."

The allegations come as cigarette makers are trying to move into vaping and e-cigarettes while avoiding the ire of regulators who are concerned about the next-generation of products' ability to attract youth. Philip Morris and Altria, which both sell Marlboro cigarettes, are trying to diversify away from them into alternatives like vaping or heat-not-burn devices like the IQOS. Altria also has a stake in Juul Labs, the vaping company.

The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World was started in 2017 when Philip Morris said it would spend about \$1 billion setting up a group to reduce the prevalence of smoking. The company said it planned to spend about \$80 million annually over 12 years.

"While we have not yet filed a formal response to the complaint, we intend to deny the material allegations and defend against it vigorously," said Nicole Bradley, a spokesperson for the foundation.

Philip Morris declined to comment, referring inquiries about the lawsuit to the foundation. George Parman, a spokesperson for Altria, said the company is not a party to the case and has no affiliation with the organization. Money the foundation receives from Philip Morris International is supposed to have no strings attached. Last April, the foundation was among groups tied to messages that contradicted public health officials' warnings that smoking or vaping might put people at higher risk for severe cases of Covid-19.

Philip Morris has said the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, headed by Derek Yach, a former World Health Organization official who worked on a global tobacco treaty, makes its own decisions and that the \$160 million the company gave to the non-profit in 2018 and 2019 had no strings attached. Yach has said the groups that are funded by his organization have

their own views and that the foundation is “agnostic to the results of the research” it supports.