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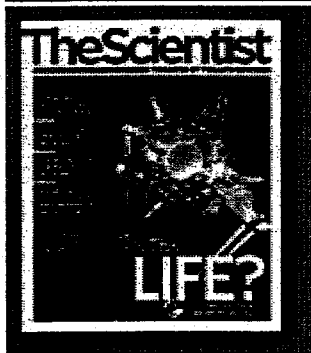
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**This month:**

January 2006

[Table of Contents](#)[Editorial](#)[Columns](#)[Features](#)[Editorial Advisory Board](#)**Today:****The Daily:**[Sign up](#) for The Scientist's daily e-mail.**Blogs:**[Today's Posts](#)**This week:****Podcast:**[TheWeek](#)**For Advertisers:**[Media Kit](#)[Web Advertising](#)[Print Advertising](#)[Contact the Advertising Department](#)[Send a digital ad](#)

By Ned Stafford

NEWS

## German scientists asked to drop tobacco funds

Funding recipients insist they're above board

[Published 3rd January 2006 11:31 AM GMT]

The lead author of a study alleging that the tobacco industry "enjoys a staggering amount of influence" among leading German scientists has called on scientific institutions, universities, and other research organizations in Germany to ban researchers from accepting tobacco industry money. However, scientists who accepted tobacco funds argue that the money had no influence on their work.

The study, recently published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, focuses on tobacco industry funding from the 1970s through the 1990s. Lead author Thilo Grüning, visiting research fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, told *The Scientist* that he believes the tobacco industry is still funding scientists, a practice he describes as a "white coat strategy" designed to gain influence with influential people. "Scientists that take money from the tobacco industry lose their independence, and this always creates biased and distorted science," he said.

Martina Pötschke-Langer, head of the German Cancer Research Center's Unit Cancer Prevention in Heidelberg and the World Health Organization's Collaborating Center for Tobacco Control, told *The Scientist* that Germany is the largest nation in the European Union with nearly 20 million cigarette smokers, and has historically been a prime target for tobacco industry research funding. "There is no doubt that the tobacco industry is still funding German scientists," she said.

As an example, Grüning mentioned Rainer K. Silbereisen, a psychologist at the University of Jena who is president of the

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International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD). Silbereisen's Curriculum Vitae on his personal Web site lists funding in 2003 from Philip Morris GmbH.

In an interview with *The Scientist*, Silbereisen said that Philip Morris had provided 60,000 euros in funding, emphasizing that the research was for "implementation and evaluation of a life-skills program for the prevention of substance misuse in children and adolescents."

He added that he disagreed with Grüning's belief that researchers who accept tobacco industry funding are no longer impartial scientists, and noted that nearly all research funding comes from third parties, including the military industry and breweries, and indirectly from taxpayers.

The VdC, Germany's cigarette industry trade organization, did not respond to requests for comment.

Grüning said his study is based mainly on documents the tobacco industry was forced to release after 1998 court rulings. "There is no reason to believe this (tobacco industry funding) has changed since the 1990s, Grüning said. However, he said that following this money is more difficult, since the industry has changed how it communicates, and important documents no longer end up on the Internet.

Grüning said that he also would like to see German research funding adopt rules that would refuse co-funding to scientist in receipt of tobacco industry funds. The German Research Foundation (DFG), Germany's largest disburser of public research funds, currently does not exclude scientists who receive tobacco industry funding.

In his AJPH article, Grüning also named Helgo Magnussen, medical director of the Grosshansdorf Hospital Center for Pneumonia-ology and Thorax Surgery near Hamburg, who received approximately 260,000 euros for research from the VdC from 1989 through 1993.

In an interview with *The Scientist*, Magnussen said he had not accepted tobacco industry money since 1993, adding that he felt it was unfair to have to answer questions 12 years later. "That is old history," he said. "I am surprised I have to answer these questions again."

He said that he had always upheld his scientific integrity and had never felt pressure from the tobacco funding. However, he noted that he "can't argue against" the theory that the tobacco industry may have had large influence with some German scientists.

Magnussen also said that he would now refuse any offer of funding from the tobacco industry, despite accepting it in the past. "Smoking is a very harmful thing," he said.

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Links within this article

T. Gruning, "Tobacco industry influence on science and scientist in Germany," *American Journal of Public Health*, November 29, 2005.

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