

Website Review: www.licensedtokill.biz

By: Olivia Wackowski, MPH

"Licensed to Kill, Inc. is a tobacco company. We knowingly kill people for profit. And we're proud of it. In fact, it is the explicit aim of our corporation. Just check our articles of incorporation..."

These are the welcoming first words on the "home page" of Licensed to Kill, Inc. (L2K), the new tobacco company in town, based in Richmond, Virginia. It is a new tobacco company that willingly admits its industry kills people every year, and urges people to "accept that fact, get over it, and move on."

But, wait a minute, is this for real? Well, yes and no...

The website is, for sure, a parody of tobacco companies, a quite clever and humorous parody, at that. The slogan of the unique "company" is: "We're Rich. You're Dead!" In the "what makes us different" section, "L2K" claims that, unlike other tobacco companies, they openly admit that smoking causes lung cancer, that they do not say one thing publicly and another thing privately, they do not hide behind an "altruistic-sounding name," and that they acknowledge to marketing openly to young people ("duh! It's plain common business sense"). Their "cigarette brands" include titles such as "Global Massacre," "L2K," "Genocide," "CHAIN," "Serial Killer," and "WOMD" (short for "Weapon of Mass Destruction). The user is invited to read the sarcastic "message from the CEO," who is appropriately named "Rich Fromdeth" (also note the jab at President Bush):

"A lot of people seem to feel that killing for profit is morally wrong or something. They seem to forget that we live in a free country, founded upon the principle of free

enterprise...The strength of our country derives from the strength of its economy. When people smoke our cigarettes, our company's stock value goes up. Likewise, our country's GDP goes up... Remember, when our economy fell into a slump following 9/11? What did our President do? He told us to go out and shop. He might as




well have told us to "go out and smoke." Every cigarette smoked represents money earned and a stronger American economy. What if there were no tobacco companies? It would be a bleak world indeed. Not only would tens of thousands of our employees around the world be out of a job, so would thousands and thousands of hospital bed manufacturers, nurses, and cancer specialists. When I go to bed at night, I think of these employees who, thanks to our company, have a roof over their heads and food on their tables. I think of our stockholders, who we are enriching. And I think of my big fat bank account that keeps on growing and growing, and my fabulous mansions and villas around the world..."

Other pages worth reading through include sections on "corporate citizenship" (a comment about political contributions), "global expansions," "investment rating," "press releases," "critic's corner," and FAQ's." Some of the FAQ's are especially amusing. One

question asks, "Considering the issues around killing and products that kill, why aren't you diversifying into other areas?" Answer: "... what would we diversify into? Twinkies? They haven't got any nicotine!"

What is *not* fictional on this website is the Articles of Incorporation. Technically, Licensed to Kill, Inc. is a real company given corporate certification from Virginia. The punch line is this: the *purpose of the company*, as written in the approved articles of incorporation, is "the manufacture and marketing of tobacco products in a way that each year kills over 400,000 Americans and 4.5 million other persons worldwide."

Licensed to Kill, Inc. was the idea of Essential Action, a consumer activist organization founded by Ralph Nader in 1982. Basically, the group not only wanted to parody tobacco companies, but also wanted to make a point about corporations and states' roles in the foundation of companies in the U.S. According to a spokeswoman for Essential Action, Ms. Anna White, the group "wanted to show how easy it is to incorporate a company in the U.S. and how the government has literally given corporations a license to do whatever they want, regardless of the threats to public health and safety." They admitted that any other state would also have granted the certification, but chose Virginia because it is the new home state of Philip Morris headquarters.

Essential Action succeeded in pulling off this witty and telling scheme. See the website for yourself, and enjoy the creative writing that we know is based on some very real truth. 

Study: Smoking During Pregnancy Increases ADHD Risk

New research from the United Kingdom finds that women who smoke during pregnancy put their unborn child at risk for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Reuters reported November 20, 2003.

For the study, researchers at the University of Wales College of Medicine surveyed pregnant women to determine if they smoked and analyzed Conduct Disorder Symptoms in 1,452 pairs of twins.

While genetic factors were linked to most cases of ADHD in the twins, lead researcher, Dr. Anita Thapar, said the study also found that smoking during pregnancy significantly influenced the development of ADHD symptoms in the children.

"Our findings extend previous work by being the first to demonstrate that the association of prenatal smoking with ADHD remains even when the genetic contribution to ADHD symptoms is included," Thapar and her research team concluded.

The study's findings are published in the November 2003 issue of the American Journal of Psychiatry: <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/>.

Thapar, A., et al. (2003). Maternal Smoking During Pregnancy and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Symptoms in Offspring. American Journal of Psychiatry, 160(11): 1985-1989.