

RESEARCH FUNDING

Philip Morris Pulls the Plug on Controversial Research Program

Philip Morris has ended a controversial 8-year-old program that supported research at dozens of U.S. universities. The tobacco company's decision removes a major factor behind a recent decision by the University of California (UC) to monitor the flow of such support into the 10-campus system.

"It's a big shift," says K. Michael Cummings, head of the Tobacco Control Program at the Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York. He accuses Philip Morris—the largest tobacco-industry sponsor of U.S. academic studies—of having supported "bogus" research. Now, he says, the company is retreating from a public relations fiasco. UC and other universities have been fighting internal battles for years about whether to ban tobacco-industry money, leading to "unseemly" coverage in the news, he says. Philip Morris spokesperson William Phelps, who confirmed last week that the company has ended its external research program, defended the quality of the research. He says that future support will be aimed at studies on "reducing the harm of smoking." He declined to say how much would be spent at universities.

Launched in 2000, the Philip Morris External Research Program (PMERP) has funded 470 research proposals at about 60 U.S. medical schools, according to the

company. Studies have included examining the molecular basis of atherosclerosis and gene expression in lung tumors. But critics have charged that PMERP was no different from earlier, discredited Philip Morris programs—and had the same goal of confusing the public about the dangers of smoking (*Science*, 26 April 1996, p. 488).

The company notified grantees last September that it would no longer fund new research through PMERP. But the news only spread to the larger academic community after UC President Robert Dynes, in a 5 February letter, reminded UC chancellors to stringently review tobacco-sponsored research funding, as per a resolution adopted by UC's governing body in September. In an aside, he also noted that Philip Morris, "the only known current tobacco industry sponsor of University of California research," has shut down its external research program.

The effect of the decision on academic science remains unclear. At UC alone, 23 grants were funded by Philip Morris as of fiscal year 2006–2007, for a total of \$16 million. James Enstrom, an epidemiologist at UC Los Angeles (UCLA) who uses Philip Morris money, says it means a change in the way things are done in his lab. "It's just something I have to deal with," he says.

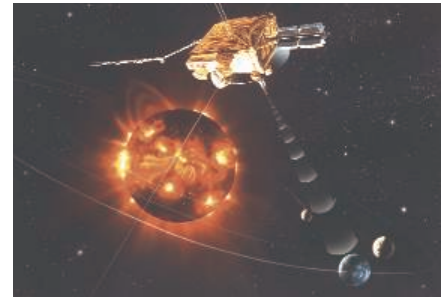
But bioengineer and anti-tobacco crusader Stanton Glantz of UC San Francisco says not to count Philip Morris out of the academic game just yet. He cites a \$6 million Philip Morris grant recently obtained by UCLA researcher Edythe London to study addiction, which Glantz says was not funded through PMERP. In Philip Morris's new strategy, funding may also go to studies of "reduced harm" products, such as spitless tobacco, at least some of which will be done in-house. Cummings doesn't buy the efficacy of such products, but he says ending PMERP is a "positive move."

—DAVID GRIMM

The ashes remain. The biggest academic research program funded by the tobacco industry has ended.



CREDITS (TOP TO BOTTOM): JPL/ESA, SIEWERT FALKO/DPA/LANDOV



A Good Death

At 17, Ulysses is ancient in spacecraft years, so the announcement last week that the \$1.15 billion joint NASA–European Space Agency mission will end within weeks was not too surprising. Neither was the cause: freezing to death as the spacecraft's radioisotope electrical generator inevitably winds down. "Ulysses is a terrific old workhorse," says project scientist and mission manager Richard Marsden, himself a 30-year veteran of the solar system–probe project. In its 6-year looping orbit, Ulysses has studied everything from the solar wind blowing from the sun's poles to interstellar dust and gas crossing Jupiter's orbit. Now the space agencies can start saving the \$8 million per year in Ulysses operations costs and consider their next billion-dollar mission. —RICHARD A. KERR

DNA Database for Indian Tigers

NEW DELHI—With India's tigers on the ropes, the Department of Biotechnology plans to create a national DNA database to better ascertain the number of individuals left in the wild. Last week, the Indian government pegged the tiger population at 1411—less than half the number estimated in 2002 (*Science*, 22 February, p. 1027). Experts attribute the decline to poaching, human encroachment, and habitat loss. Under the \$250,000, 2-year project, individual tigers will be identified from variations in mitochondrial and nuclear DNA collected from scat and hair samples. "Due to the tiger's cryptic and secretive behavior, it is not possible to enumerate and monitor its populations through direct observations," says the project's lead investigator, Lalji Singh, a molecular biologist at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad.

In addition to making population estimates more credible, he says, DNA could help law enforcement officials crack down on poaching. Qamar Qureshi, a wildlife biologist at the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun, says that although the technique "sounds promising," the cost of analyzing each sample—about U.S. \$65—could be prohibitive over the long run.

—PALLAVA BAGLA