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TRANSCRIPT

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Forest Sawyer, anchor:

Tonight, a Day One investigation that could completely transform the tobacco industry. It was back in 1964 that the Surgeon General declared cigarettes to be hazardous to your health. After that, cigarette companies were forced to change the way they labelled and advertised their product. It was the biggest challenge the powerful cigarette industry had ever had faced. Until now. For nearly a year, Day One has been investigating nicotine, the ingredient in cigarettes that keeps smokers addicted. And we've discovered that cigarette manufacturers have been carefully controlling levels of nicotine in cigarettes. Late last week, when word of our investigation got out, the Food and Drug Administration announced it is now considering whether to regulate cigarettes as drugs. And Congress is planning to hold hearings on the issue next month--hearings that could be the first step toward a ban on cigarettes as they are now manufactured. Now clearly, this story is just beginning. And this investigation from John Martin is what started the new cigarette war.

John Martin reporting:

(Visual of tobacco fields) From these tobacco fields comes one of the world's most profitable and addictive substances. To many smokers, cigarettes are simply leaves rolled in white paper. In reality, cigarettes are a complex, scientifically engineered product about which little is known publicly.

Martin: (To Representative Mike Synar, Democrat, Oklahoma) Do you think tobacco companies have been open and honest with people about what's in their product?

Mike Synar (Representative, Democrat, Oklahoma): Absolutely not. In fact, they've done just the opposite--they've basically blocked any attempts for us to give an honest account to the American public of the ingredients within the product.

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Martin: One ingredient contained in these tobacco leaves is known--nicotine. The "1988 Surgeon General's Report" identified nicotine as a highly addictive drug and said, 'This is why smoking can be as difficult to quit as heroin or cocaine.' One of the writers of the report was addiction expert, Doctor Jack Henningfield(?).

Doctor Jack Henningfield (Addiction Expert): A cigarette is essentially the crack cocaine form of nicotine delivery.

Martin: Now, a lengthy Day One investigation has uncovered perhaps the tobacco industry's last best secret--how it artificially adds nicotine to cigarettes to keep people smoking and boost profits. The methods the cigarette companies use to control the methods of nicotine is something that has never before been disclosed to consumers or the government. For years, growing and blending tobacco was an art. But about thirty years ago it began evolving into something quite different. (Clip of 1960's Promotional Film. Voice says: 'In Legatt(?) and Meyers(?) Laboratory, modern science makes certain that the smoker gets precisely what he expects to get.')

And one thing smokers are supposed to get is nicotine. That was made clear decades ago by a Philip Morris official. He wrote this confidential internal memo: 'Think of the cigarette pack as a storage container for a day's supply of nicotine...Think of the cigarette as a dispenser for a dose unit of nicotine...Think of a puff of smoke as the vehicle of nicotine.'

It was here in Winston-Salem, North Carolina that the manufacturing process began to change. The RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company pioneered a two-step process to make cigarettes more cheaply and to control the level of nicotine. Step one: it developed reconstituted tobacco, which is made of stalks and stems and other waste that it used to throw away.

Don Barrett(?) (Attorney): The American public doesn't understand that the tobacco...that it's not a natural tobacco leaf. So much of the cigarette is so-called 'reconstituted' tobacco. It's a manufactured product.

Martin: Don Barrett sued the American Tobacco Company on behalf of a client who has since died of cancer. Barrett discovered a great deal about how cigarettes are manufactured.

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Barrett: They take the material, the dust...the tobacco dust that fell on the floor and maybe sweep those up and dump them in a big bin and they would use that to make the so-called 'reconstituted' tobacco.

Martin: The processes involved in controlling the nicotine level are company secrets. This former RJR manager asked to be interviewed in silhouette.

Unidentified Former RJR Manager: On the average, the Portland(?) marketed brands contain about twenty-two percent reconstituted tobacco. The cut-rate or generic brands typically contain usually about double that.

Martin: Day One commissioned a laboratory analysis that confirmed the industry's heavy use of reconstituted tobacco. In one brand from RJR, (Winston Cigarettes shown) it comprised a quarter of the cigarette. In another, about a third. Even though reconstituted tobacco allows the companies to produce cigarettes more cheaply, there are problems--poor taste and less nicotine. So here's what the companies do in step two--they apply a powerful tobacco extract containing nicotine and flavor to the reconstituted tobacco. This process, too, is meant to be secret. Of the five companies we contacted who supply the extract, only one would talk to us on camera.

Dan Malheise(?) (Vice President of Dr. Madis Laboratories): The tobacco people are very secretive with what they use. Some of them...I would think if you ask them whether they use tobacco, they might just say they don't, you know?

Martin: Dan Malheise is the Vice President of Dr. Madis Laboratories. He told us how they make this concentrated extract that is rich in nicotine.

Malheise: You put the solvent on it, whatever solvent it is--water or alcohol--and then you percolate it, and after you percolate it, you concentrate it. It's basically the same as you have in a drip-coffee pot. It's kind of a syrupy consistency, you know, like molasses.

Martin: Why would the tobacco companies use this nicotine rich syrup?

Unidentified Former RJR Manager: They put nicotine in the former of tobacco extract into a product to keep the consumer happy.

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Martin: They're fortifying the product with nicotine. Is that correct?

Unidentified Former RJR Manager: The waste-filler--yes they are.

Dr. C. Everett Koop (Former Surgeon General): Well, as you describe that, as I've heard it for the first time, it makes my blood boil, because what they are now selling is not a tobacco product which happens to have nicotine in it, but they are selling a nicotine dispenser. And that is quite different.

Martin: To try to verify that nicotine is being added to the reconstituted tobacco in cigarettes, we went to The American Health Foundation, a respected research center in Valhalla, New York. At Day One's request, the Foundation separated and then analysed the reconstituted portion of several brands of RJR cigarettes. Reconstituted tobacco ordinarily contains twenty-five percent or less of the nicotine in regular tobacco. But the samples we tested had up to seventy percent of the nicotine that would be found in regular tobacco. Bogdan Perkoptchick(?) performed the analysis.

Bogdan Perkptchick (Researcher at The American Health Foundation): I was kind of surprised because I expected it to be less. The most likely explanation is that some nicotine has been added either with flavor ingredients or by itself.

Martin: (To Joseph Depathese(?) and John Robinson, RJR Scientists involved in tobacco research) Why are you adding nicotine to your cigarettes?

Joseph Depathese (RJR Scientist Involved in Tobacco Research): We are not, in any way, doing that.

Martin: You're not adding nicotine?

Depathese: No, we don't do that.

Martin: Joseph Depathese and John Robinson are RJR scientists involved in tobacco research.
(To Depathese) You know about tobacco extracts, though?

Depathese: I do know about tobacco extracts. They...they're used as flavor materials. It's very common in the tobacco industry.

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Martin: Is there nicotine in those?

Depathese: A water extract of tobacco would have nicotine in it.

Martin: How much?

Depathese: Just like a water extract of the coffee bean would have caffeine in it.

Martin: So would this be a little bit, or a lot?

Dapathese: It's hard for me to say. I don't know what a little bit or a lot would be. But I think that...

Martin: How much does it have?

Dapathese: I think any company involved in the manufacture of tobacco and whose consumers are demanding a wide range of tar and nicotine products...they have blending and reconstituted tobacco techniques for reaching those...that range of tar and nicotine in their products.

Martin: But how much nicotine is added? The companies control the dosage precisely according to this former RJR manager. (To manager) In commercially sold cigarettes, what percentage of tobacco extract is nicotine?

Unidentified Former RJR Manager: That really depends on what level the process calls for. In other words, I can say to you, I want it at one percent, I want it at five percent, I want it at ten percent, I want it at fifty percent.

Martin: It's this ability to control the exact dosage of nicotine with tobacco extract that is so alarming to Dr. Greg Connelly(?), a Massachusetts health official.

Greg Connelly (Massachusetts Health Official): Tobacco extract is taking nicotine out of tobacco leaf. It's a drug called nicotine. It's a euphemism. It's like calling heroin 'poppy seed oil.' It's a drug, it's a drug, it's a drug.

Martin: Publicly, the companies say they are adding this extract just for the flavor. But there is evidence to contradict that. First, an extract industry manager told Day One cigarette makers also use his product to give reconstituted tobacco a quote, 'kick.' That kick, he says, comes from nicotine. Second, even RJR's own

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researchers say they believe nicotine is a primary reason people smoke. They have identified nicotine's effect on the body, it's ability to reduce anxiety, increase mental alertness. In this 1992 study, co-authored by RJR's Doctor Robinson, they wrote, 'The beneficial effects of smoking on cognitive performance are a function of nicotine absorbed from cigarette smoke.' In addition, patents owned by the cigarette company show they are well aware of the science of dosing and delivering nicotine. According to this 1980 patent, obtained by Day One, Lowes(?) the parent company of cigarette maker, Laurelarde(?), held the rights to a system that is 'especially attractive...in enriching the nicotine content of reconstituted tobacco.' Doctor John Slade, an expert in nicotine addiction, has researched cigarette patents.

Doctor John Slade (Expert in Nicotine Addiction): My conclusion from looking at this is that the tobacco companies have been doing this for a very long time, fine-tuning the nicotine content of their products.

Martin: LTR Industries, a French Subsidiary of Kimberly Clark, even advertises in a trade journal that its process for treating reconstituted tobacco 'permits adjustments of nicotine to your exact requirements.'

There's another way nicotine is added to cigarettes. And it begins, perhaps surprisingly, at docks like this one in Newark, New Jersey. It is here that nearly pure nicotine is brought ashore to be combined with alcohol. It's called denaturing. The mixture can then be applied to tobacco during the manufacturing process for, among other things, flavoring. As these trucking records show, Philip Morris, for example, received thousands of gallons of this alcohol mixture during the 1980s. The cigarette makers say this mixture leaves only a tiny amount of nicotine on the tobacco. Still, any kind of nicotine manipulation disturbs critics like Cliff Douglass, of the American Cancer Society.

Cliff Douglass (American Cancer Society): The public doesn't know that the industry manipulates nicotine, takes it out, puts it back in, uses it as if it were sugar being put in candy. They don't have a clue.

Martin: Neither, apparently, do members of Congress.

Synar: Well, it disgusts me.

Martin: Were you aware of that?

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Synar: No, I wasn't. They don't want anybody looking at their product, and the reason is exactly what you just went through. So that they can doctor it, they can alter it, they can do anything with it, and they can literally jeopardize the health of the American public without having any consequences.

Martin: The tobacco industry boasts that it makes cigarettes with various yields of nicotine, as demonstrated over the years when it tests them on a machine like this one. The industry says the availability of low-tar, low-nicotine cigarettes (Doral, Newport, Camel Ultra-Lights, True, Camel Lights shown) gives consumers a choice.

Henningfield: Scientifically, the low-tar, low-nicotine cigarette notion is basically a scam.

Martin: Jack Henningfield of The National Institute of Drug Abuse argues that these low-yields are, for the most part, attained not by removing nicotine, but by using filters and air-holes. But smokers get around this, he says.

Henningfield: They take a few extra puffs, they inhale a little more deeply, they beat the machine, they beat the cigarette. They get all the nicotine their body needs to maintain addiction.

Martin: Actually, if the companies wanted to take out all the nicotine, they could. (To Depathese) Well, the truth is, you could take all the nicotine out of cigarettes and sell them. Couldn't you?

Depathese: We have not done that.

Martin: But you could do it.

Depathese: Well, as scientists and engineers here at R&D, I think that that could be done, but I think the real issue here is...is that we, as a company, are providing a legal product to people who are looking for a pleasing sensory experience with mild pharmacology(?).

Martin: So, why don't cigarette makers take the nicotine out of cigarettes?

Koop: Because they wouldn't sell cigarettes. If cigarettes didn't give you a bang, they wouldn't sell them.

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Martin: Philip Morris knows this from its own experience. In 1991, it test-marketed Next, a de-nicotized cigarette that it withdrew from the market because, without nicotine, few smokers would buy it.

How tobacco companies manipulate nicotine and their reluctance to take it out strongly suggests that they want smokers to get nicotine and they want them to get it in controlled doses. Several months ago, when we tried to get a reaction about all of the from the Food and Drug Administration, the agency declined comment, but immediately set out investigators to look into the matter on their own. Then, learning of our Day-One broadcast tonight, the FDA sent out this letter on Friday: quote, 'evidence brought to our attention is accumulating that suggest that cigarette manufacturers may intend that their product contain nicotine to satisfy an addiction.' That's why the FDA says it may have the legal basis on which to regulate these products.

Connelly: If the industry could put nicotine into Nabisco Shredded Wheat and get compulsive breakfast eaters, I'm sure they'd do it.

Martin: But they can't, of course. That's because nicotine is regulated in every other form, including nicotine patches and nicotine gum, which people use to quit smoking. Cigarette's are the exception. That's because the tobacco industry has been highly successful in getting Congress to protect it from regulation according to Dr. Connelly, the Massachusetts Health Official.

Connelly: They exempted the cigarette from the federal hands in the Substances Act, Controlled Substances Act, Toxic Substances Act, Consumer Product Safety Act. Every major piece of health legislation since 1964 has had a specific exemption for cigarettes.

Synar: The lobby of tobacco is probably one of the most pervasive lobbies in Washington DC. Wherever two member of Congress are gathered together, you can probably find tobacco money.

Martin: But the FDA has indicated it doesn't need Congress's permission to act, though it wants its guidance. Even without legislation, the FDA believes it already has the legal authority to act on it own, and, given the evidence now under consideration, the agency could ban all cigarettes with addictive levels of nicotine--in other words, virtually every single cigarette on the market.

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Koop: I would think that if I were the administrator of FDA and I learned that nicotine was being added to cigarettes to increase the amount of nicotine present, that I would view that cigarette as a delivery device for the use of nicotine which is, under ordinary circumstances, a prescription drug. And I would think that demanded regulation.

Sawyer: John, this is really a remarkable story, but regulation is a really big word. When they talk about regulating the cigarette industry, what do they mean?

Martin: It means that the cigarettes would have to be certified as safe and effective, as any other drug is, by the Food and Drug Administration.

Sawyer: What about the cigarettes being sold today? Can they be certified?

Martin: Many of them could not because they have higher levels of nicotine than the Surgeon General has said is addictive and I'm certain the FDA would have them banned on the market.

Sawyer: Remarkable. What does the tobacco industry say about all of this?

Martin: Well, they say they're not really adding nicotine, that they're moving it from one part of the tobacco product to another. And they presumably could offer a cigarette that is simply the leaf, and not this reconstituted filler material. However, that would raise the amount of nicotine, and it probably wouldn't help them avoid regulation.

Sawyer: Well, obviously there's a lot more to come here. You're still working on this story?

Martin: We're going full speed ahead this week.

Sawyer: And we will watch for that next development next week. John Martin, thanks very much.

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