RJR Is Planning Final Market Test For New Cigarette

By SUEIN L. HWANG
And TIMOTHY NOAH
Staff Reporters of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. is taking the final steps to prepare Eclipse, its new low-smoke cigarette, for the consumer market amid an effort to gather support from antismoking forces.

Officials at No. 2 cigarette maker Reynolds say they are readying Eclipse for final market testing, slated to take place in the Chattanooga, Tenn., area in the next six to eight weeks. Designed to reduce smoke and cancer-causing tars by heating rather than burning tobacco, Eclipse marks the latest in a long and troubled quest by the cigarette industry to come up with a safer product.

The company is "happy with the product," and wants to test a few marketing messages, said David Fishel, a spokesman for the RJR Nabisco Holdings Corp. unit. "We've done very extensive focus-group testing, and we want to get one last look in the marketplace before we really consider selling," he said, adding that the Chattanooga test won't involve selling Eclipse to consumers.

Meanwhile, public-health officials say Reynolds is assembling a group of leading tobacco opponents to brief them on the technical details of Eclipse. At a time when the nation's biggest cigarette makers are fighting a move by the Food and Drug Administration to regulate tobacco, the meeting appears to be an attempt by Reynolds to defuse opposition from tobacco-control forces against its unusual new product.

One leading tobacco foe, New Jersey medicine professor John Slade, said Reynolds has invited him and other health advocates to a meeting about Eclipse, tentatively scheduled for Friday at the company's Winston-Salem, N.C., headquarters. Dr. Slade, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, said participants will "gauge how each side feels about what the other has to say."

Reynolds's Mr. Fishel said he wasn't aware of any such meeting and declined to comment. Reynolds's efforts with Eclipse follow its disastrous investment in a smokeless cigarette called Premier, which it withdrew in 1989 after just five months of test-marketing. In addition to attracting criticism from health advocates, Premier drew scant interest from smokers, many of whom found it too hard to light and disliked the taste. Others complained the product was too hard to draw on, forcing smokers to suck hard to get any flavor out of it. Reynolds ultimately sank $300 million in the ill-fated product.

Any bid to offer Eclipse to the public is sure to draw close scrutiny from the FDA. When Reynolds trotted out Premier, tobacco opponents were quick to declare it a novel nicotine-delivery device and demanded that the FDA regulate it. And last year, the FDA launched a landmark effort to regulate even ordinary tobacco products as drug-delivery devices.

"From what we've been told, this product certainly appears to be a nicotine-delivery device," said Jim O'Hara, a FDA spokesman. But he added that the agency would need more data from the company about this "unconventional product" to evaluate its regulatory status.

According to Dr. Slade, who says he helped organize the meeting at Reynolds's request, representatives of neither the FDA nor any other government body were invited to RJR's planned briefing.

Eclipse first surfaced in late 1994, when it was revealed that Reynolds was testing the cigarette in focus groups around the country. Like Premier, Eclipse doesn't burn tobacco and retains its original length even when finished.

But there are some important differences between the two. Premier relied on an aluminum cylinder that held beads of nicotine-containing glycerine. Eclipse is filled with tobacco and reconstituted tobacco like ordinary cigarettes. Eclipse also uses a charcoal tip that, when lighted, allows glycerine in the cigarette to evaporate and deliver the flavors to the smoker.

Eclipse

Uniroyal Chemical To Partially Ban Use of Pesticide

By TIMOTHY NOAH
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON — Uniroyal Chemical Co., which manufactured the now-banned pesticide Alar, will partially withdraw another widely used pesticide believed harmful to young children.

The Environmental Protection Agency, which announced the company's voluntary withdrawal of propargite, emphasized that residues of the pesticide on fruits and vegetables pose no immediate risk to the food supply. Store owners won't be asked to clear shelves of foods treated with propargite, and the EPA is urging parents to continue feeding their children fresh fruits and vegetables.

Propargite, about one to three million pounds of which is used annually in the U.S., is used to keep mites off various crops, including apples, pears and peanuts. The pesticide was first marketed in 1969.

The EPA, which announced the action just before the holiday weekend, seemed eager to avoid something similar to the Alar scare of 1989. After environmental groups and CBS's "60 Minutes" publicized cancer risks associated with Alar, which was used on apples, many parents stopped feeding their children apples even though their dietary benefits greatly outweighed any immediate risks. The EPA recently calculated that propargite would cause as many as two cancers for every million people exposed, based on accumulation of the pesticide over a lifetime of consumption.

After consulting with the EPA, Uniroyal Chemical, based in Middlebury, Conn., agreed to voluntarily ban the use of propargite on apricots, apples, peaches, pears, plums, figs, cranberries, strawberries, green beans, and lima beans. The action comes after baby food makers Gerber, Heinz and BeechNut all said they would no longer use produce treated with propargite.

The pesticide's use will continue on some other crops, including grapes, nectarines, potatoes, mint and lemons.

Ken Weinstein, a Washington-based attorney for Uniroyal Chemical, said the company believes propargite to be safe. But to address "public concerns," he said, "they decided to remove this from the market while further scientific testing is going on."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
MONDAY, APRIL 8, 1996