



The Consumer Advocates for Smoke-free Alternatives Association

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To: Caryn Cohen
Office of Science
Center for Tobacco Products
Food and Drug Administration
Document Control Center
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From: Alex Clark
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The Consumer Advocates for Smoke-free Alternatives Association (CASAA)

RE: Amendments to modified risk tobacco product applications (MRTPAs), submitted by Swedish Match for eight General Snus products.

I. Introduction

The following comments are submitted on behalf of The Consumer Advocates for Smoke-free Alternatives Association (CASAA) regarding the modified risk tobacco product applications (“MRTP applications”) submitted by Swedish Match (SM) for eight General Snus products. CASAA is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit public health and education NGO and is the leading representative of consumers who use or might in the future use low-risk smoke-free tobacco and nicotine products. It is a U.S. membership organization with more than 230,000 members. CASAA advocates on behalf of consumers and does not represent the interests of industry.

We are writing in full support of SM’s application to make a single modified risk marketing claim about General Snus. Consumer awareness of, and access to, very low-risk alternatives to smoking is critical to improving public health. We believe that snus and other smoke-free tobacco products are a vital part of the overall strategy to reduce the early death and disease attributed to smoking. Truthful marketing statements about the low risk of using smokeless tobacco are timely and crucial, and people who smoke should have been made aware of the lifesaving benefits of switching to snus decades ago.

II. General Snus meets the standards for a modified risk order

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (“TCA”) requires the MRTP application to demonstrate that “such products, as it is actually used by consumers, will (A) significantly reduce harm and the risk of tobacco-related disease to individual tobacco users; and (B) benefit the health of the population as a whole taking into account both the users of tobacco products and persons who do not currently use tobacco products.”¹

In its MRTP application, SM convincingly demonstrates that General Snus presents lower risks to individuals and at the population level. The evidence presented goes on to demonstrate that people who completely replace their smoking habit with General Snus can significantly reduce their risks of developing lung cancer, oral cancer, respiratory disease, stroke, and heart disease.

With regard to the potential of non-tobacco user and former smoker uptake of General Snus, SM outlines how limited the exposure to their modified risk claim will be by virtue of snus being a very small portion of the smokeless tobacco category. Moreover, SM is committing to adhere to strict marketing guidelines which target existing, legal-age tobacco consumers.

While we applaud SM’s commitment to keeping advertising away from young people and non-tobacco users, we think it is a shame that modified risk tobacco messages are specifically being designed not to reach beyond the narrow focus of existing tobacco consumers. Certainly, it is appropriate that people who smoke are the primary target for such messages, but we believe that genuine public health interests would include friends, family, and medical

¹ Section 911(g)(1) of the TCA.

professionals who can have an influence on someone who smokes decision to switch to a low-risk tobacco product as meaningful targets for marketing campaigns.

III. The modified risk claim for which approval is sought is appropriate

SM seeks to make the following truthful claims:

- “Using General Snus instead of cigarettes puts you at a lower risk of mouth cancer, heart disease, lung cancer, stroke, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis.”

We note the emphasis on encouraging people who smoke to choose General Snus instead of continuing to smoke. Although not explicitly articulated in SM’s marketing strategy, the emphasis on consumer choice in their modified risk claim echos a pillar of harm reduction which calls for non-judgmental, non-coercive means to reducing attendant harm.² By comparison, statements proposed for inclusion in other MRTP marketing campaigns use the language of “switch completely.” While we appreciate the frank honesty of such statements, for many people who smoke, they may resonate as demands from anti-tobacco activists and echo expectations of government public health agencies. Many people who smoke are numb to such directions and may even associate them with decades-long shame campaigns. Refreshingly, SM is simply stating the verifiable low-risk nature of its snus and leaving it up to the consumer to *decide* to use it rather than insisting on a radical behavior change.

IV. Conclusion

We remain concerned that required warning labels on snus and moist snuff continue to misinform consumers about the risks of using smokeless tobacco. Consumers have a fundamental right to truthful and accurate information so that they can make informed choices about decisions that affect their health and well being. It is the worst kind of public policy that insists on misleading consumers into believing that all tobacco products carry the same or similar risks. This effectively forces consumers to make decisions with bad information, leading in many cases to bad decisions that compromise their health.

While we agree that every effort should be made to discourage youth use of tobacco and nicotine products, it is imperative that FDA devote time and resources to making appropriate balancing statements about low-risk products that can help people who smoke improve their health.

For the foregoing reasons, we respectfully urge this committee to favorably recommend FDA approval of SM’s MRTP applications for General Snus. Just as important, we strongly encourage TPSAC to acknowledge that people who smoke are capable of understanding risk

² Harm Reduction Coalition, “Principles of Harm Reduction.” Accessed from <https://harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/>, January 2019.

differentials among tobacco products. Every MRTP application that this committee considers is an opportunity to begin remediating the harm of misperceptions about nicotine and smoke-free tobacco products.

Disclosure:

CASAA accepts donations from many sources and has no financial or policy agreements with industry stakeholders. CASAA's policy for allocating resources is that all contributions are used for efforts that will maximize consumer access to and awareness of low-risk, smoke-free nicotine and tobacco products. CASAA has not received any financial or in-kind support from Swedish Match.