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## Time for the Truth

Advertising is the most important news broadcast over television, because there's so much of it. In the case of cigarettes, the commercials are aimed at informing viewers, especially youngsters, that smoking is part of the socially acceptable, rich life and a good thing to do. This is inaccurate, for as the Public Health Service has demonstrated smoking can, and does, lead to cancer and heart disease.

Now, in a recent decision the Federal Communications Commission has ruled that stations which carry cigarette commercials must give "fair time" for ads and programs telling of the dangers. The decision was unanimous and came in response to a letter from a New York citizen who complained that WCBS ran ads which portrayed cigarette smoking as desirable. He wanted equal time for the opposite view. "The advertisements in question," the commission said, "clearly promote the use of a particular cigarette as attractive and enjoyable. Indeed, they understandably have no other purpose. We believe that a station which presents such advertisements has the duty of informing its audience of the other side of this controversial issue of public importance - that however enjoyable, such smoking may be a hazard to the smoker's health." However, the FCC turned down the request for equal time, coming out for "fair time" which it vaguely defined as follows: "A station might, for example, reasonably determine that the above noted responsibility would be discharged by presenting each week, in addition to appropriate news reports or other programming dealing with the subject, a number of the public service announcements of the American Cancer Society or HEW in this field. We stress, however, that in this as in other areas under the fairness doctrine, the type of programming and the amount and nature of the time to be afforded is a matter for the good faith and reasonable judgment of the licensee, upon the particular facts of the situation."

Before making its decision, the FCC cleared it with Senator Warren Magnuson (D, Wash.), who heads the Commerce Committee and his opposite in the House, Harley Staggers (D, W.Va.). Magnuson, whose comments on the industry have become increasingly harsh, said, "Frankly, until such time as a safe cigarette has been developed I firmly believe that the cigarette industry should withdraw all advertising from the mass media. Barring that, the cigarette industry, broadcasters, the advertising agencies should cooperate with such groups as the American Cancer Society in presenting the full known facts of the hazards of smoking in a way best calculated to get the message to our young people."

The American Cancer Society says it will open its film library to stations looking for spot commercials

and programs. In the past HEW has done little to mount a general advertising campaign against smoking. It should now take the lead in putting together the ads and making sure they are used. The government also should push the FCC to rule that not only "fair time" but "equal time" is given to groups which seek to inform the public about the hazards of smoking. The tobacco growers and the ad agencies and the networks won't like it. But when the "public interest, convenience and necessity" is so clearly on the side of saving lives, their preferences and profits are a distinctly secondary consideration.