

# Lighting organic material and sucking it into your lungs

 [devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20040708-00](http://devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20040708-00)

July 8, 2004



Raymond Chen

Last year, The Philip Morris Companies renamed itself to the warm-and-fuzzy sounding Altria Group. Gotta love the colorful abstract logo they've got. (Psst, editors of the Altria home page: It's "Whom We Fund". "Whom" with an "m".) They claim the name comes from the Latin *altus* ("high") but that doesn't explain where the "r" comes from. Any similarity to "altruism" is purely unintentional, I am certain. Would a tobacco company lie to me? Or, As Business 2.0 put it, "[The renamed company] does not, however, stop producing tobacco, which does not stop causing cancer." Plus of course there's the matter that there is already a company called Altria Healthcare, which was none too pleased that a cigarette company decided to choose a name that matched theirs. But a Philip Morris spokesperson said that there is no conflict, pointing out that it is okay for companies to share the same name as long as they are in different fields of business, and "In our case that's not an issue. We're in very different lines of business." Because Altria Healthcare's job is to help people **improve** their health. Anyway, I was reminded of their 1995 recall of 8 billion cigarettes out of concern that their customers may become sick because the cigarettes allegedly contained the chemical methyl isothiocyanate (MITC). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention investigated this problem and concluded that while it was true that the recalled cigarettes contained MITC, so too did cigarettes manufactured both before and after the recall, as well as cigarettes by other manufacturers. In other words, there was nothing wrong with those cigarettes. Well, aside from the fact that they are cigarettes.

Michael Eriksen, chairman of the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health noted that the real problem is "lighting organic material and sucking it into your lungs". Somehow this way of describing smoking struck me as elegantly dry.

[Raymond Chen](#)

**Follow**

