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## Re: Sponsorship by Big Oil, Like the Tobacco Industry, Should Be Banned by the Research Community

### To the Editor:

The provocative editorial by Kogevinas and Takaro<sup>1</sup> suggests that the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE) has embarked on a slippery slope of advocacy and selective indignation. Kogevinas and Takaro<sup>1</sup> were apparently displeased by Big Oil companies' sponsorship of the ISEE/International Society of Exposure Science (ISES) joint conference held in August 2018 in Ottawa, Canada. In their editorial, they point to ISES as being responsible and propose that we in the field of Environmental and Occupational Health should no longer accept research funding from Big Oil companies.

One expects that Drs. Kogevinas and Takaro<sup>1</sup> are aware that their own organization is being sponsored by one of the most notorious e-commerce employers on our planet: Amazon. Within the November 2018 ISEE newsletter,<sup>2</sup> the following suggestion is made: "As the holiday season

approaches, remember that you can donate 0.5% of your Amazon purchase price to ISEE. To take advantage of this program, simply go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) and register to support "International Society for Environmental Epidemiology" before you make your purchases. These donations will go into ISEE's general account and will be used to improve the services offered by the society."

Amazon's reputation for poor treatment of its own workers should be familiar to every ISEE member who reads newspapers.<sup>3,4</sup> Objecting to sponsorship from Big Oil while accepting sponsorship from Amazon may point to inconsistent standards.

Does the Kogevinas and Takaro<sup>1</sup> editorial perhaps imply that we should only accept governmental funding, or are some governments more acceptable than others? For example, is it acceptable for ISEE to take issue with the UralAsbest Cohort study carried out by the International Agency for Research on Cancer but funded by the Russian Federation?<sup>5</sup> In that case, shouldn't ISEE also provide its members with a list of countries from which the receipt of research money is not acceptable?

My opinion is that ISEE should not wade into the murky waters of politics and advocacy. Instead, I would advise ISEE and ISES members to secure funding from any source, as long as they are able to guarantee total independence and scientific integrity through firewalls and independent scientific advisory committees. There is no need for ISEE or its ethics committee to have the last say in what is acceptable or not. Furthermore, close collaboration with governments, industries, nongovernmental organizations, employers (associations), unions, and individual workers is a must, because within our field of public health what ultimately counts is to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" by 2030.<sup>6</sup> That is closer than we think.

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## The Authors Respond

### To the Editor:

Dr. Kromhout<sup>1</sup> states that we can accept funding from anyone as far as there are sufficient firewalls to protect researcher's independence. He mentions that by putting limits in sponsorship of scientific societies, " ... International Society for Environmental Epidemiology has embarked on a slippery slope of advocacy and selective indignation" (!-our exclamation mark). His own university (University of Utrecht), similar to most universities, research institutes, and medical journals, seems to be on the same "slippery slope" and does not accept funding from the tobacco industry.<sup>2</sup> Is it only the tobacco industry that is too biased to be trusted? Our commentary<sup>3</sup> argues that the fossil energy industry also shows a bias in the science of climate change and thereby provides guidance in where to draw the line. It is worrisome that experienced researchers

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