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## Man Sues Big Tobacco and Local Retailers, Alleging Prenatal Exposure, Deceptive Messaging, and Lasting Health Damage

**Dennis Yodzio claims exposure to tobacco smoke before birth rewired his brain for nicotine addiction, leading to decades of heavy smoking, a 2023 triple bypass, and lasting harm; his lawsuit accuses Big Tobacco and VI retailers of fraud and conspiracy.**

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Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, and the Liggett Group, along with local retailers Pueblo Supermarkets, Cost-U-Less, and Plaza Extra, are facing a lawsuit filed by Dennis Yodzio. The septuagenarian plaintiff alleges that exposure to tobacco smoke even before birth predisposed him to a lifetime of nicotine addiction, ultimately leading to decades of cigarette use and severe health consequences.

Mr. Yodzio says he began smoking as a child and was a regular smoker by the age of 13. According to his 88-page civil complaint, exposure to secondhand smoke “rewired his brain for nicotine addiction,” making his eventual dependence nearly inevitable. By the time he was 18, he was smoking an average of two packs per day, favoring Camel, Marlboro, Salem, and Newport.

The lawsuit asserts that smoking was widespread and normalized in the Virgin Islands until the late 1980s. Even as public awareness of smoking’s dangers grew, Mr. Yodzio claims that aggressive counter-messaging from tobacco companies undermined those warnings. He recalled believing as a youth, “If cigarette smoke was really dangerous, tobacco companies would tell people the truth.” The complaint describes how he saw two female spokeswomen on television assuring the public that cigarette smoke was safe, with similar messages appearing in print media.

By the early 2000s, Mr. Yodzio says he discovered that tobacco companies had admitted to deceiving consumers, doctors, and government regulators about the dangers of smoking. He began attempting to quit but struggled for years before finally stopping in 2011.

Despite quitting, Mr. Yodzio’s health had already been severely damaged. In August 2023, he underwent triple heart bypass surgery, which his lawsuit attributes to the long-term effects of cigarette use. “Cigarette smoke, tar, nicotine and other cigarette smoke toxins have significantly and adversely and negatively affected Plaintiff’s cardiovascular system,” the complaint states.

The lawsuit accuses the tobacco companies of fraud, misrepresentation, and conspiracy, arguing that their actions were a substantial factor in why Mr. Yodzio began smoking at a young age and why he remained addicted for decades. It highlights previous judgments against R.J. Reynolds in the Virgin Islands as evidence of mal-intent and points to a broader conspiracy involving deceptive marketing campaigns by cigarette manufacturers and local distributors. These efforts, the complaint alleges, sought to downplay scientific and legal consensus that there is no safe level of direct or secondhand smoke.

In addition to strict products liability, the claims include negligence, fraud, fraudulent concealment, misrepresentation, and conspiracy. Mr. Yodzio seeks compensatory and punitive damages, along with awards for pain and suffering, loss of enjoyment of life, and mental anguish.