

var articleheadline = "Tobacco firms kept quiet on polonium role in cigarettes ";Some of the world's biggest tobacco firms researched the lethal radioactive substance polonium – present in cigarettes – over a 40-year period but never published the results, according to a new scientific article.

Polonium 210 is known to cause lung cancers in animals and studies suggest it is responsible for 1 per cent of all lung cancers – equivalent to 11,700 deaths globally – each year in the US. It is also the substance that poisoned the Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006.

Yet tobacco companies, while attempting but failing to remove the substance from their products, have kept quiet about their research, experts say.

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