

Australia cigarette pack branding ban moves closer

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Australia's parliament has passed two bills moving the nation closer to becoming the first to introduce plain cigarette packaging in a move Health Minister Nicola Roxon Thursday called "courageous".

The bills, aimed at banning tobacco company product branding, passed the lower house unopposed and will now go to the upper house, where it is not expected to meet much resistance.

Under the proposed legislation aimed at reducing smoking rates, due to take effect next year, all logos will be removed from cigarette packaging in Australia, with company brand names printed in a uniform font.

Packets would also be a bland olive-green and contain graphic [health warnings](#) such as black, diseased gums, blinded eyes and children in hospital.

"This is the first very courageous step that our parliament has taken to introduce plain packaging," said Roxon.

"We're going to be the first country around the world to introduce it and January 1 is the start date and it looks like the legislation will be well and truly passed by then."

The plans, which are being closely watched by other countries considering similar policies, have enraged the tobacco giants, who say there is no evidence plain packaging will reduce smoking rates.

They are also concerned it would reduce their profits and see [counterfeit products](#) flood the market.

But Roxon said they would have to live with it.

"There isn't any safe amount of tobacco that you can smoke. It will kill you eventually and we obviously want to make sure that that message is heard loud and clear," she said.

Australian Medical Association president Steve Hambleton urged [senators](#) to get behind the Tobacco Plain Packaging Bill 2011 and the Trade Marks Amendment (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Bill 2011.

"This legislation will save lives," he said

"And we have to send a message to Big Tobacco that people's lives are more important than their profits."

Canberra says 15,000 [Australians](#) die of smoking-related diseases every year, and that [tobacco](#) use costs the country Aus\$31.5 billion (US\$33 billion) annually in healthcare and lost productivity.

Though Australia would be the first country in the world to mandate plain packaging, New Zealand, Canada and Britain have considered a similar approach.

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