

Australia slams 'sick joke' cigarette packs

September 12 2012

Australia slammed as a "sick joke" Wednesday new cigarette packs on sale as part of the national phase-in to plain packaging which play on drab branding and claim it's "what's on the inside that counts."

[Tobacco products](#) in Australia will have to be sold in drab, uniform khaki packaging with graphic [health warnings](#) from December 1 under a new anti-smoking policy upheld last month by the nation's highest court.

In order to meet the shelf deadline products must be manufactured in plain packets from October 1 and Imperial Tobacco rolled out one last branded packet Wednesday which attracted the ire of Health Minister Tanya Plibersek.

The new box shows the Peter Stuyvesant brand ripped at one corner to reveal the new drab-look box and comes with information to customers about the coming changes claiming "it's what's on the inside that counts."

"We're going plain early because we know Peter Stuyvesant will continue to live on inside," Imperial's advertising says.

Plibersek condemned the interim packets as a "the ultimate sick joke from big tobacco" and said they exposed the falseness of industry complaints that they would not be able to meet the December deadline.

"That packaging at the moment is not illegal but I can tell you it's unprincipled. The [tobacco companies](#) are using their packs to have a last desperate gasp at promoting their brand," the [health minister](#) said.

"And yes, they're right, it's what's in the pack that counts, and what we used to call them when I was a kid was cancer sticks."

A spokeswoman for Imperial said the packaging was "a mechanism to provide factual information about upcoming legislative changes to adult consumers of the Peter Stuyvesant brand of cigarettes.

"It is also important to inform our adult consumers that the product itself will remain unchanged," the spokeswoman told AFP.

[Tobacco firms](#) failed in their attempt to have plain packaging struck down by the High Court of Australia, but the policy is still being challenged at the World Trade Organization and in an investment treaty lawsuit filed by Philip Morris Asia in Hong Kong.

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