

Australia readies for first plain pack cigarettes

November 30 2012

All cigarettes sold in Australia will be in identical, plain packages from Saturday in a world first after the government overcame legal challenges from the tobacco industry.

Under new laws which come into effect on December 1, all tobacco products must be sold in drab, olive-brown packets with expanded graphic health warnings which feature images such as gangrenous feet and [mouth cancer](#).

Health Minister Tanya Plibersek said the packets, which survived a constitutional challenge from major [tobacco firms](#), were about making smoking less attractive.

"That's the aim of this exercise," she told reporters in Sydney.

"The challenge for us as a government is to make it (smoking) as unappealing as possible. If we can prevent young people from taking it up, that's a lifetime gift to them."

[Tobacco companies](#) had fought the change, but the High Court rejected their argument that the new law infringed their intellectual property rights by banning brands and trademarks from packets.

Plibersek said tobacco companies had reported no changes to their products, but there was a possible psychological effect of the new packages making them less attractive to some people.

"I have had a few letters... with smokers saying to me, 'Oh the cigarettes don't taste the same as they used to'," she said.

The minister said after [World War II](#) about 50 percent of Australians smoked but this had now dropped to 15 percent and the government was aiming to push it down to 10 percent by 2018.

The new legislation comes into force as a study conducted for the Cancer Council of Victoria found that one-in-four smokers believe the [effects of tobacco](#) on health are exaggerated.

The research looked at the impact of Australia's health warnings on [cigarette packages](#), which for years have included graphic images depicting health issues arising from smoking.

Its study of 4,500 smokers in Victoria state from 2003 to 2011 found that about a quarter still believed the dangers of smoking had been exaggerated and one in 10 did not believe or were not sure that smoking caused illness.

"From tomorrow, the outside of cigarette packaging will finally reflect the ugliness of what's inside and leave no smoker in any doubt of how deadly cigarettes are," Quit Victoria executive director Fiona Sharkie said.

Sharkie said the graphic health warnings had already made a difference.

"While the main intent of plain packaging is to reduce the appeal of smoking among youth, we've already had several calls... from smokers who say the graphic [health warnings](#) have pushed them to quit," she said.

Smoking is one of the leading causes of preventable death and disease in Australians, killing an estimated 15,000 every year.

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Citation: Australia readies for first plain pack cigarettes (2012, November 30) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-11-australia-readies-plain-cigarettes.html>

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