

Tobacco giant welcomes Thai court cigarette warning order

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Tobacco giant Philip Morris on Monday praised a Thai court decision to suspend government plans that would have forced cigarette companies to slap bigger graphic warnings on packets.

The firm, which makes the Marlboro brand, welcomed the Thai Administrative Court's order to suspend implementation of new packaging rules, which were due to come into force on October 2.

The [health ministry](#) in April decided to enlarge [health warnings](#)—which feature gruesome photographs of smoking-related [ailments](#)—from 55 to 85 percent of the surface of both sides of every cigarette packet.

"Today's decision now clears the way for us to show the court that this measure is not only illegal but also unnecessary given that the health risks of smoking are universally known in Thailand," said Onanong Pratakphiriya, of the company's Thai arm.

Philip Morris has argued that the ministry overstepped its legal powers and that the move would impair firms' abilities to display their trademarks.

The company welcomed the decision in a statement which accused the health ministry of ignoring "the voices of thousands of retailers, manufacturers and many other impacted stakeholders".

The administrative court said it had not ruled on the substance of a [legal](#)

[challenge](#) by the firm.

"The court instructs that the health ministry's order should be delayed until the court makes its final ruling or a further order," it said in a statement Monday about its decision, which was made Friday.

Philip Morris has said its production system could not cope with the new requirement to print multiple pictures, the court said.

Japan Tobacco, one of the world's biggest cigarette companies, with brands including Winston and Benson & Hedges, said in June it was suing the Thai government over the plans.

The tobacco lobby has systematically tried to block laws curbing advertising or raising taxes on cigarettes, but more and more countries are adopting the approach.

European Union member states in June agreed to cover 65 percent of packaging with health warnings, but the new rule needs approval from the European Parliament to come into force.

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