

Graphic smoking warnings delayed despite new law in Philippines

August 7 2014

Graphic warnings on Philippine cigarette packets will not appear for almost two years despite the law technically coming into force on Thursday, with health officials blaming pressure from a powerful tobacco lobby.

"We wanted only a six-month (transition) period. But that is what the legislators said. There is nothing we can do," the leader of the department's [tobacco control](#) office, Marilisa Calvadores, told AFP.

President Benigno Aquino signed the bill into law in July after political wrangling by a government that discourages [smoking](#) even as it encourages a politically powerful tobacco-growing industry.

The warnings will not appear on cigarette packs until about May 2016, Calvadores said.

"The rationale was to give [cigarette manufacturers](#) a chance to use up the supplies that are already in the market," she added.

Emer Rojas, head of the New Vois Association, an anti-smoking group, said a powerful bloc of legislators from tobacco-growing regions had successfully watered down the law.

"This (law) was a compromise but it is far better than nothing. It is in the right direction but there are features we don't like," he told AFP.

The law mandates that the [graphic warnings](#), showing the harmful effects of smoking, should cover the bottom half of the [cigarette pack](#).

Rojas described the provision giving cigarette companies 20 months to put out the warnings and exhaust their stocks of unmarked packs as "delaying tactics".

Officials of the country's tobacco industry association could not be contacted for comment.

Just over 28 percent of all adults in the Philippines smoke, and an average of 240 Filipinos die every day from smoking related diseases, according to the WHO.

In 2013 Aquino, who has been chided for his inability to quit smoking, signed a "sin tax" bill dramatically raising the taxes on tobacco products.

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