

Big Tobacco cries foul after hard-line UN treaty

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Tobacco companies argue that so-called "harm reduction" products like e-cigarettes should not face the same restrictions as cigarettes

Big tobacco companies moved Thursday to counter the hard line taken

by a global tobacco control treaty, including its decision that new "vaping" products should face the same restrictions as cigarettes.

A meeting of state parties to the UN health agency's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) concluded last week with a number of anti-industry rulings, including increased efforts to curb industry influence and a call to crack down on [new products](#).

Philip Morris International (PMI) and Japan Tobacco International (JTI) responded by releasing surveys suggesting the public would prefer a more industry-friendly approach.

On Thursday, PMI published a poll it commissioned from Ipsos about attitudes to new so-called "harm-reduction" products such as e-cigarettes and heated [tobacco](#) sticks.

The survey of 31,000 people across 31 countries, conducted in September, showed that "77 percent of adults agree that governments should do all they can to encourage men and women who would otherwise keep smoking cigarettes to completely switch to better alternatives," PMI said in a statement.

Safer alternatives?

PMI and other companies say such products are far less dangerous than traditional cigarettes, and insist they can help smokers unable to quit completely switch to "safer" alternatives.

These alternatives are key to halting a smoking epidemic that causes some seven million deaths annually, the industry says.

But the World Health Organisation's FCTC dismissed that argument, calling Saturday for the same bans on advertising, promotion and

sponsorship deals that apply to cigarettes.

FCTC chief Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva argued that the tobacco industry was disingenuously trying to suggest that promoting heated tobacco could be part "of a harm reduction strategy."

PMI lamented Thursday that the decision by treaty members "will mean that millions of smokers will not know about better alternatives to cigarettes."

Moira Gilchrist, PMI's vice president of scientific and public communications, insisted that "the science is clear. The evidence shows that switching to a smoke-free product is a better choice than continuing to smoke."

Anti-tobacco activists are meanwhile quick to point out that the companies' claims that their new products are safer are based only on industry-backed scientific studies.

"On multiple occasions, they have duped governments about the relative safety of their new products," Matthew Myers, head of Tobacco Free Kids, told AFP last week, pointing to past industry claims when filtered cigarettes and low-tar [cigarettes](#) first emerged.

JTI also published a survey this week, commissioned from Populus also using Ipsos fieldwork, which it said showed the public wants regulators to work with the industry rather than keep them in the cold.

The treaty parties decided to strengthen measures to keep tobacco company representatives and anyone with tobacco ties out of its meetings.

But JTI said its survey of nearly 8,500 people in eight European

countries, conducted between September 28 and October 4, showed that "72 percent believed that it is either very important or somewhat important that the policy-making process is open to dialogue between governmental authorities and all parties who are potentially impacted by it, including businesses."

Slamming the FCTC meeting as an "echo chamber", JTI said its poll showed that "the public wants politicians and officials to consider all the facts and viewpoints, including from businesses."

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