

Brazil sues tobacco companies to recover public health costs

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Brazil's attorney general's office is suing multinational tobacco companies to recover costs by the public health care system in treating smoking-related illnesses—the first lawsuit of its kind in Latin America.

The suit filed Tuesday against British American Tobacco and Philip Morris International seeks to recuperate costs over the last five years for the treatment of 26 diseases with scientifically proven links to tobacco usage. Brazil's Health Ministry estimates that the country loses the equivalent of \$3.5 billion per year due to medical expenses and lost productivity from nicotine addiction.

"Since the profit of this business is sent abroad, it's more than fair that these multinationals pay the burden they are leaving with Brazilian society," said David Bressler, a coordinator from a regional prosecutor's office.

The attorney general's office said Philip Morris and British American Tobacco and their subsidiaries are responsible for 90% of Brazil's cigarette sales and manufacturing.

The U.S.-based Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids called the case in Brazil "historic" and said that the attorney general's office is "courageously standing up to multinational tobacco companies and seeking just compensation the Brazilian people deserve."

About 428 people die per day in Brazil because of nicotine dependency, and 90% of lung cancer cases in the country are related to smoking tobacco, according to the Health Ministry.

The World Health Organization estimates that the global economy loses \$1.4 trillion a year in healthcare costs and lost productivity due to tobacco-related illness. Similar lawsuits in the U.S. and Canada have forced tobacco companies to pay billions for health damages.

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