

Tobacco firms launch legal challenge against UK plain-packaging

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Four tobacco giants on Thursday launched a High Court legal challenge against a British law banning the use of logos or branding on packets of tobacco products from May 2016.

Philip Morris International, British American Tobacco, Imperial Tobacco and Japan Tobacco International claim "plain-packaging" illegally deprives them of their trademark intellectual property.

In a bid to discourage smoking, the government introduced a law forcing all packets to be a dark brown or green colour, where it is not covered by a health warning.

Brand names can only be added in small, plain-font lettering.

Lawyer David Anderson, representing Japan Tobacco International, told the High Court in London that the firm manufactured "lawful products", which contributed around £10 billion (\$15 billion, 13 billion euros) to the tax authorities.

The claimants argue that plain-packaging violates British and European Union law, and that evidence from countries in which it is already law failed to prove it reduced smoking rates.

British American Tobacco claimed that plain packaging was "not achieving its public health objectives", and was leading to younger smokers choosing cheaper, more unhealthy, brands.

Imperial, Britain's leading seller of cigarettes, said legal action was a "last resort" but that they "have been left with no option than to defend our [intellectual property](#) rights in court".

The government said it would "robustly" defend the policy.

"Smoking is catastrophic for your health and kills over 100,000 people every year in the UK, with the burden of disease falling most heavily on poorer communities," said a Department of Health spokesman.

Deborah Arnott, Chief Executive of health charity ASH, called the challenge "a desperate last ditch move by the [tobacco companies](#)".

"We expect the industry to lose," she said.

"But of course they still hope that by tying up government officials and the court system for as long as they can, and by making the case as complicated and expensive as possible, they might put off governments in poorer countries than the UK from following our example."

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