

PICTURE-BASED PACK WARNINGS



Highlights:

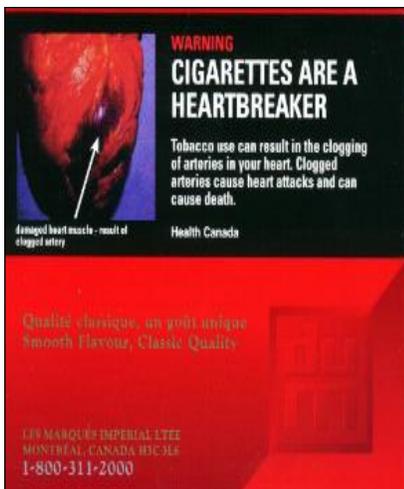
- Graphic health warnings are an important, accessible source of information that particularly targets those who smoke.
- Graphic health warnings are an inexpensive way for governments to convey the severity of health risks of direct and passive smoking.
- Graphic health warnings help to encourage quitting, or attempts to quit, and discourage people from starting to smoke.

Why Graphic Health Warnings?

Purchasers of a product that kill about one in two long-term users clearly have the right to sufficient information about the risks of that product¹. Thus, informative, detailed warnings are a basic form of consumer protection to which tobacco users are entitled. Unfortunately for many of the world's smokers, such warnings are often vague, mild and nearly invisible. However, some countries have taken the lead by mandating strong, clear and easily visible warnings. The best of these warning systems include pictures, are compelling and provide detailed information.

Such pictorial warnings, described by key Canadian advocate Garfield Mahood as "mobile billboards", are far more attention-grabbing than traditional text-only messages. They also help to reduce the attractiveness of cigarette packets, which have become the primary source of tobacco promotion as ad bans spread throughout the world. Furthermore, while text-based warnings are important for conveying information about the health risks of smoking, studies show that more comprehensive health warnings, including larger pictorial or graphic warnings, are more effective in relaying the severity and full range of health risks caused by smoking².

In fact, graphic warnings help increase people's motivation to quit or attempt to quit smoking, as noted in a Canadian survey which found that 38% of smokers or ex-smokers considered the graphic warnings to be "a factor" or "a major factor" in their quit attempt³.



Canadian Package

THAI ADVICE:

*"Package labeling is a vital measure in controlling tobacco. It should be mandated with minimum cost, changed at appropriate intervals, and improved consistently"*⁵. Further tips:

- rather than give authorities the freedom to choose from a range of more and less effective warnings, only the most effective ones should be put forward;
- warnings should be updated on a regular basis, as smokers will cease to notice warnings used for long periods;
- care must be taken to specify exactly how the warning should appear, so that companies cannot distort the warning;
- appropriate legal measures must be available to enforce the warnings.

The Canadian Experience:

Canada is an acknowledged leader in the use of health warning labelling on tobacco products. It first implemented rotating text-based health warnings that were the largest in the world in 1994; in 2001, it followed up with 16 rotating graphic health warnings that also set a world precedent for size (the upper 50% of both front and back) and content⁴. Canadian packages also include interior warnings, leaflets/pack inserts, information on quitting, and a quit-line number.

Facts on international requirements for picture-based warnings:

More than 25 countries have requirements for picture-based warnings. Mauritius has the largest warning requirement at 65% on front and back (to be implemented June 1st, 2009), followed by Australia, New Zealand and the Cook Islands at an average of 60% on front and back. It is possible that Mexico will soon improve on this standard with an average of 65% (30% on front, 100% on back) after the requirements are finalized. However, Kyrgyzstan has a warning requirement for the front of the package at 52%, including a border, which will come into effect April 1, 2009.

Many countries now place graphic images on cigarette packs: Canada (2001), Brazil (2002; 2004; 2009), Singapore (2004; 2006), Thailand (2005; 2007), Venezuela (2005), Jordan (2005), Australia (2006), Uruguay (2006; 2008; 2009), Panama (2006), Belgium (2006), Chile (2006), New Zealand (2008), Romania (2008), United Kingdom (2008), Egypt (2008), Brunei (2008), Cook Islands (2008), India (2008), Iran (2009), Malaysia (2008), Peru (2009), Kyrgyzstan (2009), Djibouti (2009), Latvia (2010), Switzerland (2010), Hong Kong (SAR) (2007).

Source: Canadian Cancer Society, *Cigarette Package Health Warnings: International Status Report*, October 2008.

The New Wave: Towards Generic Packaging

Tobacco companies use attractive cigarette packs as a form of advertising, linked to advertising in other media. Words and images on packs can detract from health warnings by conveying a sense of adventure, fun, and safety. The only way to definitively eliminate the ability of manufacturers to use the portion of the packet not covered with graphic health warnings to downplay those warnings is by mandating the use of generic packaging. This would require that the non-warnings portion of all cigarette packets be the same colour (preferably white), with the name of the brand printed in a standard font and size. Most of the packet would be occupied by the government-mandated warning. A movement towards generic packaging has already begun in several jurisdictions, including Canada.

REFERENCES:

- ¹ World Health Organisation. Tobacco Free Initiative. Information on global tobacco use. Available at: www.who.int/tobacco/health_priority/en/index.html
- ² Hammond D, Fong GT, Borland R, Cummings KM, McNeill A, Driezen P. Text and Graphic Warnings on Cigarette Packages: Findings from the International Tobacco Control Four Country Study. *Am J Public Health* 2007;32(3):202-209.
- ³ Canadian Cancer Society. Evaluation of new warnings on cigarette packages. Available at: www.cancer.ca/vgn/images/portal/cit_776/35/20/41720738niw_labelstudy.pdf
- ⁴ Mahood, G. Canada's Tobacco Package Label or Warning System: "Telling the Truth" about Tobacco Product Risks. World Health Organisation. Available at: www.who.int/tobacco/training/success_stories/en/best_practices_canada_package.pdf
- ⁵ Chitanondh, H. Thailand: Country Report on Labeling and Packaging. World Health Organisation. Available at: www.who.int/tobacco/training/success_stories/en/best_practices_thailand_labelling.pdf

RESOURCES:

Physicians for a Smoke-free Canada
www.smoke-free.ca/warnings/default.htm
Campaign for Effective Health Warnings on Cigarette Packs
www.graphicwarnings.org
Tobacco Labeling Resource Centre
www.igloo.org/tobacco_labelling
Framework Convention Alliance
www.ftc.org
The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease
www.tobaccofreeunion.org/content/en/11/4.-Tobacco-labelling-and-packaging