

## Tobacco Control

### **Special supplement presents the latest evidence showing the benefits of introducing standardised packaging for tobacco products in Australia**

*Editorial points to the future packaging innovations tobacco companies would be able to employ in the absence of standardised packaging*

Over the last 50 years the avenues open to tobacco companies to market their products have been closed off, and the pack itself remains one of the last promotional opportunities, says an editorial in **Tobacco Control**. The editorial introduces a special supplement evaluating the effects of introducing tobacco standardised packaging in Australia.

Legislation requiring standardised packaging, where the pack carries only the brand name and the make, alongside a raft of graphic photos accompanying health warnings, was introduced in Australia in 2012.

Ireland has recently voted to introduce similar legislation and in the UK the House of Lords is due to vote to do so this week. If they back last week's vote by MPs, standardised packaging for tobacco products will be introduced in the UK from May 2016.

This Tobacco Control supplement reports the results of a series of studies that have evaluated the success of the policy in Australia. Some of these studies suggest that standardised packaging is severely restricting the ability of the pack to communicate and create appeal with young people and adults. Others show that there is little evidence that standardised packaging is having unintended consequences, such as lowering tobacco prices or increasing the use of illicit tobacco.

Key findings include:

- Standardised packaging was associated with increased thinking about quitting and quit attempts.
- School children aged 12–17 years found standardised packaging less appealing.
- Smokers were more likely to conceal their packs from view in outdoor venues after the introduction of standardised packaging.
- Although there was a shift to value brands following the introduction of standardised packaging in Australia, retail prices for cigarettes actually increased across the board (value, mainstream and premium brands).
- The percentage of smokers purchasing cigarettes from convenience stores did not fall after standardised packs were introduced and there was no indication of an increase in overseas, online or duty-free purchases.
- There was no evidence of an increase in the consumption of illicit cigarettes following the introduction of standardised packaging.

While the supplement focuses on the effects of introducing standardised packaging, the authors of the editorial also consider the consequences if it is not introduced.

"The pack will continue to be used as a marketing channel and innovations will proliferate," say Professor Gerard Hastings and Dr Crawford Moodie of the Cancer Research UK Centre for Tobacco Control Research at the University of Stirling, UK. They go on to outline some of the packaging innovations that tobacco companies could turn to in the future in the absence of standardised packaging.

Changes to the structural design of the pack - different sizes, openings and use of alternative construction materials - are inevitable, they say. Tobacco companies are also likely to introduce packs with special foils, varnishes or coatings that create distinct tactile experiences for consumers, and audio packs that play pre-recorded messages, music or other noises. Tobacco companies have already patented fragrances which could be released from tobacco packs, they say.

Innovations in ink technology will also find their way to tobacco packaging, they suggest. Phosphorescent 'glow in the dark' inks having already appeared on cigarette packs in some countries, and packs with light-sensitive (photochromic), heat-sensitive (thermochromic) or oxygen-sensitive inks are likely to follow. Photochromic Camel packs, which change colour according to temperature, appeared in retailers in the Netherlands for display purposes in 2014.

Conductive inks, which enable electrical circuits to be incorporated into cardboard are also opening up marketing opportunities. Cartons of Kent cigarettes, with circuit boards and touchpads enabling scrolling on-pack messages, have already appeared in duty-free outlets in Asia.

Looking into the future, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that printed electronics may be applied to deliver moving images on tobacco packaging and that cigarette packs capable of digitally communicating with consumers via smart devices (smartphones, smart watches and smart glasses) will be feasible, they say.

"Whatever directions these innovations take, it is clear that the marketing power of the pack is only going to increase. So governments which do not act on plain packaging today will have a bigger problem to tackle tomorrow," they conclude.