THE POWER OF COMMUNICATIONS AGAINST TOBACCO
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PICTORIAL HEALTH WARNINGS ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS

The first guiding principle of the WHO’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is that every person should be informed of the health consequences, addictive nature and mortal threat posed by tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke (Article 4, §1). In its 1999 report, the World Bank noted that “People’s knowledge of the health risks of smoking appears to be partial at best, especially in low-and middle-income countries where information about these hazards is limited.”

A cost-effective way to inform smokers of health consequences is through the use of pictorial warnings on tobacco products. In 2002, a survey of 9,058 smokers was conducted across four countries to determine the effectiveness of such images on cigarette packages. In Canada, where pictorial warnings on packages included information about the risks of impotence, smokers were nearly three times (2.68) more likely to agree that smoking causes impotence when compared with smokers from the US, UK and Australia where there were no such images. The results also confirmed that warnings that are graphic, larger and more comprehensive in content are also shown to be more effective in communicating the health risks of smoking. Indeed, 84% of respondents in Canada claimed that tobacco packaging is a prominent source of health information compared to only 47% of respondents in the US, where health warnings are small and printed on the side of the packets.

In 1999, a study was conducted to test the impact of an increase in the size of warnings from 30% to 60%. From the responses of 1,632 Canadians, it was concluded that, “there was a significant linear relationship between the size of the health warning message and its influence on the decision to stop smoking, in the range tested (30% to 60%, at 10% intervals). The larger the health warning message, the more effective it is at encouraging smokers to stop smoking.” Another study that year found that pictorial warnings were, on average, 60 times more encouraging smokers to stop smoking than messages without illustrations.

In 2001, Canada was the first country to introduce pictorial warnings which occupied 50% of the front and back of packets. The warnings include 16 rotating messages and full colour pictures. One year later, an evaluation of the Canadian pictorial warnings was very high; 76% were in favour of the mandatory system of health warnings displayed on the pack.6

The key findings among those who noticed the new warnings were:
- 44% of smokers said the new warnings increased their motivation to quit smoking
- Among those smokers who attempted to quit in 2001, 38% said the new warnings were a factor in motivating them to try to quit
- The new warnings have made 58% of smokers think more about the health effects of smoking
- On one or more occasions, 21% of smokers have been tempted to have a cigarette but decided not to because of the new warnings
- The new warnings have motivated 27% of smokers to smoke less inside their home
- Among smokers, 83% have had people they know mention or discuss the new warnings in conversations
- 62% of smokers think the new warnings make the packages look less attractive, compared to 3% more attractive and 35% no difference
- Among both smokers and non-smokers, the two warnings identified as most effective at discouraging smoking were: the warning depicting a diseased mouth and the warning depicting a lung tumour
- Just 2% of smokers are collecting cigarette packages with all of the various new exterior warning messages

These findings are not unique to Canada. In 2002, the Government of Brazil required all tobacco products to carry one of nine health messages that cover a full side of the packaging. These messages include pictorial warnings and a toll-free number that smokers can call for help to quit smoking. Two months after the introduction of the pictorial warnings 2,216 adults were surveyed. The results showed that 67% said they would like to quit smoking when seeing pictorial warnings printed on cigarette packets. In addition, the public approval rating of the new health warnings was very high; 76% were in favour of the mandatory system of health warnings displayed on the pack.4

CONCLUSION

Warning images on tobacco products make the product less attractive, target smokers by providing them with information on tobacco-related health risks and are an additional motivation for those smokers who try to quit.

Luk Joossens, Advocacy Officer, Association of European Cancer Leagues, Brussels, January 2007.
14 PICTORIAL WARNINGS WITH TEXT ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS are rotated in sets of 7 which alternate every year

AUSTRALIA REQUIRES THE LARGEST OVERALL SPACE FOR WARNINGS on tobacco products in the world

WARNINGS ON CIGARETTE PACKETS MUST COVER 30% OF THE FRONT AND 90% OF THE BACK, with graphics appearing on both the front and back of the packets

AN INFORMATION MESSAGE ON THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF CHEMICALS IN TOBACCO SMOKE MUST APPEAR ON ONE FULL SIDE OF THE CIGARETTE PACKET and 25% of one side of cigarette cartons

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL QUITLINE NUMBER AND QUITNOW WEBSITE ADDRESS ARE INCLUDED on the back of packets to provide resources for smokers seeking assistance with quitting

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS, WHICH MAY MISLEAD CONSUMERS TO BELIEVE THAT CERTAIN CIGARETTES ARE LESS HARMFUL (such as ‘light’ and ‘mild’) are banned

WARNINGS ON PIPE TOBACCO AND ON LOOSE TOBACCO must cover 30% of the front and 50% of the back of packets, with graphic warnings on both sides

EFFECTIVE since 1 March 2006
INTRODUCTION

A leader-laggard dynamic of EU member states in health policy is clearly visible in the area of tobacco control and smoking cessation policies, whereby certain member states in the EU are “leaders” in the fight against tobacco and tend to have more stringent anti-smoking rules and smoking cessation policies while “the laggards” resist the introduction of such policies in their member states. This is often linked to the political, as well as cultural tradition of member states.

Since the 1990s, the EU has played a very important role in striving for harmonisation of EU member state smoking cessation policies and in fighting smoking addiction in Europe within its competences. In 1999 the Commission put forward a new proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and the Council. During the adoption process, which lasted for approximately 18 months, the European Parliament introduced important amendments to the proposed Directive, aimed at ensuring that transparent and clear warnings on the health implications of smoking appeared on packets. Directive 2001/37, which introduced the compulsory use by member states of health warnings on cigarette packets, was a fundamental piece of legislation which harmonised the labelling of tobacco products in member states.

The final text of Directive 2001/37/EC provides guidance on the type and size of warnings, colours of warning texts, cigarette ingredients, photograph warnings and the monitoring and evaluation by the Commission on the implementation of the Directive and recommendations on further reviewing and developing the legislation to respond to scientific and technical knowledge.

The Commission published its first report in July 2005, indicating that the new warnings resulted in stronger motivation for smokers to quit. The Commission is expected to publish a new implementation report in 2007.

The Directive introduced the possibility of using pictorial health warnings on packets. The use of these warnings is left at the discretion of member states but within a common framework. In 2003 the Commission adopted a Decision setting out the rules the member states should follow when introducing these warnings along with a set of 42 illustrations that can be integrated into national legislation.

Having ratified this Directive, Belgium will be the first European country to introduce pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets in the EU as of 31 May 2007 thus breaking new ground in the fight against tobacco and its devastating consequences and placing itself as a leader in the EU in the fight against tobacco.
WHEN

- EFFECTIVE since 1 February 2002

WHAT

- ONE OF 10 PICTORIAL WARNINGS with text is printed on all tobacco products
- PRE-EXISTING TEXTUAL WARNINGS were amended to communicate stronger messages

HOW

- WARNINGS MUST COVER 100% OF THE SIDE of the packet that is the most visible to the consumer
- LABELLING OF TAR, NICOTINE AND CARBON MONOXIDE YIELDS is compulsory along with a message stating that there is no safe level of consumption
- TAR, NICOTINE AND CARBON MONOXIDE YIELDS cover one of the non-principal sides
- A NATIONAL STOP SMOKING DIAL NUMBER is also printed on the packets
- SAME RULES APPLY to packages of other tobacco products

Source: Master Comunicacao, Brazil, 2004
**WHAT**

- **Canada** was the first country in the world to introduce **warning images on packets of tobacco products**, becoming a model to other countries, including the European Union.
- **16 warnings combining images and warning texts** have to be published in equal numbers for each brand.
- **Emission levels of six toxic chemicals** – nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, benzene and hydrogen cyanide – have to be printed on one of the non-principal sides.
- **An additional message has to be included** inside the cigarette packets, either on the slide (of “slide and shell” packets) or as an insert, containing information about the dangers of smoking and recommended quit tactics.

**HOW**

- **Warnings are required to cover 50% of each main side of the packet.** The warnings are printed in each of Canada’s official languages – English and French.
- **Health Canada is currently preparing to replace** the existing pictorial warnings.

**WHEN**

- **Effective** since 20 December 2000.

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WHAT

- **42 PICTORIAL WARNINGS GROUPED IN 14 CATEGORIES**, each having an associated health message
- **TEXTUAL WARNINGS** are required on tobacco products packaging
- **PICTORIAL WARNINGS ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS ARE NOT MANDATORY THROUGHOUT THE EU**

HOW

- **WARNINGS SHOULD COVER AT LEAST 30% OF THE FRONT AND AT LEAST 40% OF THE BACK OF PACKETS** in unilingual countries and 35% of the front and 50% of the back in trilingual countries, such as Belgium
- **PRINTING OF THE CONTENTS OF NICOTINE, TAR AND CARBON MONOXIDE** on one side of the packets is required
- **WARNINGS CAN BE FRAMED BY A BLACK BORDER**, which is not included in the surface reserved to warnings
- **DEScriptive TERMS, WHICH MAY MISLEAD CONSUMERS** to believe that certain cigarettes are less harmful, such as 'light' and 'mild', are banned
- **MEMBER STATES HAVE A CHOICE BETWEEN 2 TEXTUAL WARNINGS** for the front and 12 messages for the back

WHEN

- **EUROPEAN TOBACCO LABELLING DIRECTIVE** passed in 2001
- **RULES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION** adopted / Textual warnings required as of October 2003
- **PICTORIAL WARNINGS** formally adopted in May 2005
- **BELGIUM IS THE ONLY EU MEMBER STATE TO INTRODUCE PICTORIAL WARNINGS** on packets of tobacco products by 31 May 2007
**WHAT**

- **4 PICTORIAL WARNINGS ON ALL TOBACCO PRODUCTS** which will be rotated every 12 months
- **WARNINGS CONTAIN A SKULL-AND-BONE SIGN**, a text warning such as “smoking kills” and a picture

**HOW**

- **WARNINGS MUST OCCUPY 50% OF THE MAIN DISPLAY SURFACE**, the side of the packets sold in India is most noticeable to consumers
- **WARNINGS WILL NOT BE DISPLAYED IN MORE THAN TWO LANGUAGES** to ensure the legibility of the text

**WHEN**

- **EFFECTIVE** since 1 February 2007

Source: Website of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India, www.mohfw.nic.in
WHEN EFFECTIVE in February 2008

TOBACCO RETAILERS WILL HAVE A 6-MONTH TRANSITIONAL PERIOD to sell existing stocks

HOW

● WARNINGS WILL BE REQUIRED TO COVER 30% OF THE FRONT OF THE PACKET AND 90% OF THE BACK
● ONE LATERAL SIDE OF THE PACKET WILL BEAR A WARNING ABOUT THE DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES IN CIGARETTES, replacing the previous labels of the contents in tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide
● WARNINGS WILL BE BLACK AND YELLOW, as government research has indicated that this combination is the most effective
● CIGARETTE PACKETS WILL DISPLAY INFORMATION TO HELP SMOKERS WHO WANT TO QUIT, including a free telephone number which people can call to obtain support and advice on quitting smoking

WHAT

● 14 PICTORIAL WARNINGS WITH TEXT WILL BE DISPLAYED ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS IN SETS OF 7 AND ROTATED ON A YEARLY BASIS

Source: New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2006
WHEN

• EFFECTIVE since August 2004

WHAT

• 6 PICTORIAL WARNINGS WITH TEXT ARE PRINTED on both main sides of cigarette packets

HOW

• WARNINGS MUST COVER AT LEAST 50% OF EACH SIDE OF THE PACKET, be impossible to cover or obliterate and the text must be easily legible
• YIELDS OF NICOTINE AND TAR HAVE TO BE PRINTED ON ONE OF THE LATERAL SIDES OF THE PACKET, together with the prohibition of sales to persons under the age of 18
• A NATIONAL QUIT LINE NUMBER, which provides assistance for smokers seeking to quit, must be printed on packets
• SMALL CONTAINERS OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS, as well as smokeless tobacco, only require text warnings

Source - Health Promotion Board, Singapore and www.tobaccofacts.info
WHAT

- 6 PICTORIAL WARNINGS with text on cigarette packets
- THE LABELLING REGULATION IN THAILAND WAS ACCOMPANIED BY A BAN ON TOBACCO SALES NEAR SCHOOLS AND RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS, tax increases on tobacco products and the ban of sponsorship of government programmes by tobacco producers

HOW

- HEALTH WARNINGS MUST COVER 50% of each side of the packet

WHEN

- EFFECTIVE since 25 March 2005

Tobacco and Alcohol consumption control section, Bureau of Non-communicable disease, Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand.
WHAT

- URUGUAY IS THE LATEST COUNTRY IN THE AMERICAS to have introduced pictorial warnings on cigarette packets
- 8 PICTORIAL HEALTH WARNINGS must be printed on cigarette packets

HOW

- WARNINGS MUST COVER 50% of both sides of the packet
- EACH SIDE WILL CARRY A DIFFERENT PICTOGRAM
- THE WARNING MESSAGES ON CIGARETTE PACKETS WERE INTRODUCED along with the ban on smoking in public places
- URUGUAY IS THE FIRST COUNTRY IN THE AMERICAS to have introduced 100% smoke-free workplaces
- IN 2006, THE PAN-AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANISATION PRAISED URUGUAY for its tobacco control activities

WHEN

- EFFECTIVE since April 2006
WHAT

- **SET OF 10 PICTORIAL WARNINGS** with text must be printed on cigarette packets

HOW

- **WARNINGS HAVE TO COVER ONE FULL SIDE OF THE PACKETS.** Of this, 70% is reserved to the picture and 30% to the text
- **NICOTINE, TAR AND CARBON MONOXIDE CONTENT, WITHOUT INDICATING THE ACTUAL YIELDS,** must be printed on one full lateral side of the packet
- **MISLEADING LABELLING,** such as “low tar”, “light”, “soft” etc., is prohibited
- **PACKETS MUST CARRY A WARNING** that there is no safe level for consumption

WHEN

- **EFFECTIVE** since April 2005