Protect children from tobacco marketing: standardise tobacco packaging

Cancer Research UK has a long record of investing in research on how to reduce smoking. We back standard packs because research shows that they can reduce the uptake of smoking in the UK

**Standard packs are...**

**Needed:**

- Eight in 10 smokers start by the age of 19 and half of all long-term smokers will die from a smoking-related disease: more than 100,000 people across the UK every year².
- More than 4.5 million UK smokers started smoking before the age of 16, and more than 7 million UK smokers started smoking before the age of 18¹.
- There is substantial evidence that advertising and promotion draw young people into smoking⁴,⁵,⁶ and that packaging is an important part of tobacco promotion⁷. Standard packs will build on the success of the advertising ban.
- Smoking prevalence in the UK currently stands at just below 20% and is even higher among vulnerable groups, including children in care⁸,⁹.

**Wanted:**

- 85% of people back Government action to reduce the number of young people who start smoking (YouGov, 2012)¹⁰.
- 63% of people support standard packs with only 16% opposed (YouGov, 2012)¹¹.
- Over 250 health and wellbeing organisations support standard packs, including the British Medical Association, Royal Medical Colleges and health charities – as well as the World Health Organisation.
- 85% of all mothers and grandmothers with children under 18 believe that children should not be exposed to any tobacco marketing (YouGov, 2013)¹².

**Practical:**

- Early research from Australia revealed that smokers using standard packs were 70% more likely to say they found their cigarettes less satisfying. Furthermore, smokers using standard packs were 81% more likely to rate quitting as a higher priority in their lives than smokers using branded packs¹³.
- International experts say standard packs will not increase the illicit trade – all the existing security features will still be in place on standard packs. Latest HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) figures show that the illicit cigarette market has more than halved since its peak in the early 2000s¹⁴.

**Reducing smoking is vital to preventing cancer**

- Smoking is the largest preventable cause of cancer, responsible for one in four deaths from cancer.
- Tobacco control is central to any strategy to tackle health inequalities as smoking accounts for approximately half of the difference in life expectancy between the lowest and highest income groups. Smoking-related death rates are two to three times higher in low-income groups than in wealthier social groups¹⁵.
- The UK has made a lot of progress¹⁶, but one in five adults still smoke¹⁷.
Where we are now

- On 10th February 2014, the House of Commons passed the Government’s standard packs amendment to the Children and Families Bill, after a cross-party amendment was accepted in the Lords. The amendments were voted on with 453 MPs in favour - and only 24 against - a majority of 429.
- Prior to this vote, on 28th November 2013 the Government announced an independent review of the public health evidence to be chaired by paediatrician Sir Cyril Chantler, expected to report in March 2014.
- Public Health Minister, Jane Ellison MP, said: “If, on receiving Sir Cyril’s review, the Government decide to proceed, that will allow standardised tobacco packaging to be introduced without delay”.
- Cancer Research UK said: “This government’s stated intention to bring in standardised packaging of tobacco shows great leadership. If this becomes law next year there is no question that it will save thousands of lives in the future.” The Government had previously announced that it would “wait until the emerging impact of the decision in Australia can be measured before we make a final decision on this policy in England”.

International support

- In December 2012, Australia became the first country in the world to implement standard packs.
- The Republic of Ireland is set to become the second country to implement the measure having committed to introducing legislation. New Zealand has also given its commitment to implementing standard packs, pending the outcome of legal challenges mounted against Australia.
- A host of other countries, including France, Norway, Canada, India, Finland and South Africa, are at various stages of consideration of the policy.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) strongly backs standard packs. They are in line with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – the UK is one of 177 parties to this unique global health treaty.

Support in the Devolved Nations

- On 21st January 2014 the Welsh Assembly approved a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM), tabled by the Welsh Government, which paves the way for standardised packaging to be introduced in Wales if the UK Government goes ahead with the introduction of such regulations.
- On 28th January 2014 the Scottish Parliament unanimously approved a LCM which will allow the powers created in the Children and Families Bill to be applied to Scotland.
- The Northern Ireland Assembly has also approved a LCM enabling it to adopt regulations should the UK Government proceed. The LCM, agreed by the Assembly on 3rd February 2014, will enable Northern Ireland to opt-into UK-wide regulations.

Standard packs mean all tobacco products look alike

They are packaged in a standard shape without existing marketing & design features:
- Health warnings remain.
- Brand name in standard type face, colour and size.
- Standard shape, colour and method of opening the packet.
- Duty paid stamp remains with covert markings that show the pack is not counterfeit.
- Cigarettes are also standardised in size and colour.

Right: An example standard pack
The Evidence

To inform the consultation on standardised packaging, the Department of Health commissioned a systematic review\(^2\) of all the available evidence for its impact. Leading Cancer Research UK researchers were involved in the review.

- A total of 37 studies were included, meeting stringent methodological and relevance criteria.
- After the review was published, research in Australia\(^{25,26}\), the UK\(^{21,28}\), Norway\(^{27}\), Brazil\(^{29}\), Canada\(^{31}\), the USA\(^{32}\), France and Germany\(^{33}\), has supported its findings.
- A review from the UK Centre for Tobacco Control and Alcohol Studies in September 2013\(^3\) detailed a total of 54 studies on standard packaging. They consistently demonstrate that standard packs would reduce the appeal of smoking.

Quantitative research

- All the quantitative studies within the systematic review which examined the attractiveness of standard packs found they were less attractive than branded equivalent packs, to both adults and children.
- People associate personality characteristics with brands and the kind of people that smoke them, such as ‘cool’ and ‘popular’.
  - Standard packs were consistently rated less favourably on these measures than branded packs.

Qualitative research

In the systematic review’s qualitative studies which examined appeal, some key themes emerged to explain why standard packs were consistently rated as less attractive, of lower quality and had a poorer image than branded packs. Standard packs:

- Weaken attachment to brands and project a less desirable identity for the smoker.
- Expose the reality of smoking and have colours with negative connotations.

These findings reflect comments made by 15 year olds in qualitative research for a report\(^5\) for Cancer Research UK by the Centre for Tobacco Control Research at the University of Stirling. Some branded packs had an emotional impact, with teenagers saying:

It looks as if you're more mature. Better and more popular.

It makes me feel quite cool ... It makes you feel stylish and that, kind of upper class.
Talking about feminine ‘superslim’ cigarettes, girls said:

If any of them are attractive, it’s that one just because it’s kind of perfume shaped.

They look too colourful to be harmful.

Evidence from inside the tobacco industry
In the late 1990s, legal action in the USA led to millions of internal tobacco industry documents being released. In the same period, the House of Commons Health Select Committee investigated internal documents from the UK tobacco industry’s main advertising agencies. By definition they are about past, rather than current, activities.

The Cancer Research UK funded Centre for Tobacco Control Research (CTCR) reviewed the academic research on these documents and found that:

- Branded packaging is a key promotional tool and its importance has grown as it becomes one of the last marketing vehicles.
  - The tobacco industry has made substantial investment in packaging design research since at least the 1950s using focus groups, market surveys and the use of techniques to measure eye-movements.
- Young people and females have been especially targeted.
  - Documents show that tobacco companies monitor packaging to ensure the brand is appealing to youth.
  - Industry documents provide strong evidence of the importance of recruiting new smokers, due to high brand loyalty to the first brand smoked and low rates of switching of brands.
  - Packaging is seen as one of the most important ways for communicating brand imagery, that is, all the associations that consumers connect with the brand.

To keep up with the latest developments, the CTCR audited the tobacco retail press from 2009 to 2011. They found an increasing number of mentions of innovative packaging such as packs that have curved edges, flip tops or side drawers. For example, the Marlboro Bright Leaf opens like a cigarette lighter with a ‘click’ sound. There are a number of reports in the retail press of how new packaging designs have boosted sales, for example the introduction of Silk Cut Superslims resulted in a year on year growth of 122% between 2008 and 2009 according to Japan Tobacco International. Similarly British American Tobacco said product innovations such as flavoured tobacco and box branding, contributed to their rise in annual sales and market share for leading brands such as ‘Dunhill’, ‘Lucky Strike’ and ‘Pall Mall’.

Tobacco Industry Myths
The US courts ruled that the tobacco industry lied for decades about the health effects of smoking and its addictiveness. They have opposed every effective policy to cut smoking. In the World Health Organisation’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, to which the UK is a party, there are strong, comprehensive guidelines to protect tobacco control policies from the vested interests of the tobacco industry.

- The tobacco industry has promoted various myths about standard packs, all of which we answer below:

Myth: Standard packs are easier to forge so smuggling will rise.
Fact: The existing packs are not a significant barrier for counterfeiters. Cigarette packs are already so easy to forge they have covert markings so that enforcement officials can distinguish illicit cigarettes. Even sophisticated tax stamps can be quickly forged. With these markings and large pictorial warnings packs will not be easier to forge.

A 2013 report from the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Smoking and Health stated: ‘Evidence to our Inquiry showed that existing packaging can be cheaply and readily copied by illicit manufacturers. It also showed that external packaging is not what is used by enforcement authorities in determining whether tobacco products are illicit. Licit packs of cigarettes and hand
rolling tobacco (HRT) already carry both covert and overt security markings. These include coded numbers and anti-counterfeit marks, which would still be present on standardised packaging[43].

The overall cost of manufacturing a 20-pack of counterfeit cigarettes is around 10-15 pence – of which up to a third is estimated to be on packaging. They are typically sold in the UK for around £3. Counterfeit packaging is already so cheap to make there is no way that cheaper packaging could have a significant effect on either their retail price or profitability[44].

**Fact:** Independent experts do not agree with tobacco industry claims. The Trading Standards Institute, a representative from the EU anti-fraud office and police involved in combating tobacco smuggling in the North of England say that the introduction of standardised packaging is likely to have little or no significant impact on the level of illicit trade[45,46]. The Chairman of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, representing the third largest police force in the UK, has given his strong support for standardised packs[47].

Public spending on action against the illicit tobacco trade is highly cost effective, saving as much as £10 in tax for every £1 spent. The introduction of standardised (“plain”) packaging for cigarettes and other tobacco products would make little or no difference to this trend[48]. Cancer Research UK commissioned a report, Smuggling, the tobacco industry and plain packs, from international tobacco smuggling expert, Luk Joossens, who has advised the World Bank, the European Commission and the World Health Organisation on this issue. Luk Joossens concludes his report with this simple statement: ‘Plain [standardised] packaging will not make any difference to the counterfeit business.’

![Graph showing decrease in illicit tobacco market size](image)

**Above:** Between 2000-01 and 2012-13 the size of the illicit tobacco market (manufactured cigarettes) has fallen by 57%

**Fact:** The tobacco industry has a record of facilitating the illicit trade and exaggerates its scale. The tobacco industry exaggerates the scale of the illicit trade[49]. While still a problem, HMRC figures show it has more than halved since its peak to 9% of UK cigarettes. This is due to better enforcement by government agencies and strict curbs on the tobacco industry’s own activities[50] as it has a poor record on smuggling. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, most illicit cigarettes were genuine products manufactured in the UK, exported to continental Europe and then smuggled back to the UK.
During an investigation into tobacco smuggling by the Public Accounts Committee, the present Chancellor, George Osborne MP, said in exasperation to senior executives of Imperial Tobacco: “One comes to the conclusion that you are either crooks or you are stupid, and you do not look very stupid. How can you possibly have sold cigarettes to Latvia, Kaliningrad, Afghanistan and Moldova in the expectation that those were just going to be used by the indigenous population or exported legitimately to neighbouring countries, and not in the expectation they would be smuggled?51

The tobacco industry claims that the illicit trade is ‘booming’ (which the APPG report noted is ‘contrary to the available statistics’52). Even the Tobacco Manufacturers Association has acknowledged that the consumption of illicit tobacco in the UK is falling53,54. Major tobacco manufacturers have continued to commission and fund their own statistics to try to show the level of the illicit trade is rising55.

There is evidence of continuing involvement in the illicit trade by major tobacco companies. In 2009 it was reported that all the four big manufacturers in the UK have over-supplied the Ukraine fuelling a $2billion black market that reached across the EU56.

In 2012, a major investigative report based on internal documents and interviews with former colleagues from Japan Tobacco International, who have 39% of the UK tobacco market57, led to an ongoing investigation by the EU anti-fraud office, (OLAF). It is alleged that

- JTI took no notice of smuggling by its distributors in Russia and the Baltic states.
- An Israeli distributor was smuggling large quantities of cigarettes into Iraq and Belgium with the company taking no action.
- JTI’s Middle East business partner ‘poured cigarettes into duty free shops’ with the profits going to a company named by the EU as helping fund the Assad regime in Syria58.

**Myth:** We should wait to see what happens in Australia after a few years – removing tobacco displays will deal with the problem anyway.

**Fact:** The full impact of standardised packaging will naturally take time to see, however early research from Australia revealed that smokers using standard packs were 70% more likely to say they found their cigarettes less satisfying. Furthermore, smokers using standard packs were 81% more likely to rate quitting as a higher priority in their lives than smokers using branded packs59. Since the introduction of standard packs in Australia a recent study found a 78% increase in the number of calls to smoking Quitlines. This increase was similar to that which followed the introduction of graphic health warnings in 2006, however the impact on calls has proven more sustained60.

After implementation in Australia, Health Minister, Tanya Plibersek, discussed the many complaints from people adamant that their cigarettes tasted ‘off’: “Of course there was no reformulation of the product…It was just that people being confronted with the ugly packaging made the psychological leap to disgusting taste61.

Standard packs should be introduced alongside the removal of tobacco displays in shops - as they are in Australia because the two measures have different aims. Tobacco displays reinforce social norms of smoking among young people. Standard packs make cigarettes less attractive and health warnings more prominent to children.

**Myth:** Standard packaging is a confiscation of the property of tobacco companies and could result in significant legal and compensation costs for governments.

**Fact:** The Australian Constitutional court found that standard packs do not contravene intellectual property law. Trademarks are not being acquired; their use is being restricted.

The World Trade Organisation recognises the protection of public health as a fundamental right of its members, as specified in its Trade Related Agreement on Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), and in the Doha Declaration on the TRIPs agreement and public health.
The global tobacco industry has long used the threat of legal action as a tactic to block and delay effective tobacco control measures. Legal challenges from the tobacco industry are designed to make governments submit to ‘regulatory chill’. As the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Margaret Chan has said: “High-profile legal actions ... are deliberately designed to instil fear in countries wishing to introduce similarly tough tobacco control measures”62.

**Myth** It will take longer to serve customers in convenience shops as assistants will not so easily be able to locate different brands, meaning people go to larger shops.

**Fact**: Early research from Australia63 since implementation of standard packs is backed up by earlier peer reviewed research64 showing that it is likely that standard packs improve transaction times and enable shop assistants to locate the right packs more reliably. The research suggests this is because colours and logos can distract staff. It also showed that it is easy for servers to go from branded to standard packs.

In Australia standard packs have been introduced alongside the removal of tobacco displays, making the situation comparable with the UK, which will complete the removal of tobacco displays (in small shops) by April 2015. Multiple studies show no negative impact on retailer’s transaction times following the implementation of standard packs in Australia65,66,67.

**Myth**: Cigarette prices will fall as this is the only way for companies to compete, meaning more young people will start smoking.

**Fact**: If tobacco companies reduce their prices then taxes can be raised to compensate. There is no link between tobacco taxes and the illicit tobacco trade68,69. In Europe, illicit tobacco is most prevalent in Eastern European countries where tobacco taxes are generally lower. Illicit trade is more frequent in countries with a land or sea border with Ukraine, Russia, Moldova or Belarus, which are major suppliers of cheap and illicit cigarettes70.

**Myth**: Standard packs are a threat to employment.

**Fact**: The tobacco industry has regularly used the threat of job losses as a reason to oppose public health legislation to reduce smoking rates. The tobacco industry in the UK has been steadily reducing its workforce from around 40,000 in 197071 to 5,000 in 201072. However, this has largely been as a result of mechanisation and rationalisation73 – a deliberate move to make their businesses more efficient, rather than an enforced downsizing due to public health legislation.

Tobacco cartons amount to less than 5% of sales of folding cartons in the UK and very little tobacco packaging is produced in the UK. Industry experts estimate that manufacturing tobacco cartons accounts for 325 jobs in the UK. Cigarettes will still need to be packaged in the event of standard packs being introduced.

An impact assessment from the European Commission uses the input/output model to show that a 2% reduction of tobacco consumption across the EU would lead to a net gain in employment of 2,235 employees – industries benefit from the money not spent on tobacco, being spent on other goods and services which are more labour intensive (e.g. hospitality)74. In 2009 the cost of smoking attributable premature mortality to the UK was equal to 4.39% of GDP75.

**About Cancer Research UK**

Every year around 300,000 people are diagnosed with cancer in the UK and more than 150,000 people die from cancer. Smoking is the single greatest avoidable risk factor for cancer; in the UK, it is the cause of more than a quarter (28%) of all deaths from cancer and has killed an estimated 6.5 million people over the last 50 years76. Cancer Research UK is the world’s leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. Together with our partners and supporters, our vision is to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. We support research into all aspects of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In 2012/13, we spent £351 million on research in institutes, hospitals and universities across the UK. The charity’s pioneering work has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates in the UK double in the last forty years. We receive no government funding for our research.
References

4 For a discussion, see Chapter 2 of: Hastings, G et al. (2008) Point of Sale Display of Tobacco Products. The Centre for Tobacco Control Research, University of Stirling. Available at (pdf) http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/prod_consump/groups/cr_common/@nre/@pol/documents/genericcontent/crкumig_1000ast-3338.pdf
5 Lovato C et al. (2011) Does tobacco advertising and promotion make it more likely that adolescents will start to smoke. A Cochrane Collaboration. Available at http://summaries.chr.org/CD003439/does-tobacco-advertising-and-promotion-make-it-more-likely-that-adolescents-will-start-to-smoke
10 Figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2064 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th - 19th November 2012. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). Question: The government is considering whether to try to protect children from tobacco marketing by removing all branding from cigarette packets. This would mean all packets would look the same. There would be no colours or distinctive logos – only the name of the brand. These would all be printed in the same size and style of lettering, all packets would be the same size, and still carry prominent health warnings. The images below show how these cigarette packets would appear from the front and back. How supportive, if at all, are you of the government taking action to try and reduce the number of young people (i.e. those under the age of 18) who start smoking?
11 Figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2064 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th - 19th November 2012. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). Question: To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose this proposed plan for plain packaging?
12 Figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2278 women, of whom 533 were mothers of under 18 year olds, and of whom 561 were grandmothers of under 18 year olds. Fieldwork was undertaken between 30th April - 3rd May 2013. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).
14 HM Revenue and Customs. Tobacco tax gaps estimates 2012-13. (Table 1.1) Cigarettes: illicit market and revenue losses. Available at http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/tax-gaps.htm
18 Hansard debates. Children and Families Bill: Consideration of Lords amendments. (10 Feb 2014: Column 601). Available at http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140210/debtext/cm140210-0002.htm#140210-0002 htm_somin1
8
36 Ibid
38 Alex Ralph. The Times (1 March 2013). We’ve got less money to burn, but there is still no stopping BAT. Available at http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/business/industries/consumer/article3702539.ece (Paywall)
43 APPG on Smoking & Health. Inquiry into the illicit trade into tobacco products. (March 2013). Available at (pdf) http://www.ash.org.uk/APPGillicit2013
45 APPG on Smoking & Health. Inquiry into the illicit trade into tobacco products. (March 2013). Available at (pdf) http://www.ash.org.uk/APPGillicit2013
51 Select Committee on Public Accounts: Minutes of evidence. George Osborne MP, UK Public Accounts Committee to industry sales to Afghanistan, Moldova and Kaliningrad, (June 2002). Available at http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmpubacc/143/2061915.htm
52 APPG on Smoking & Health. Inquiry into the illicit trade into tobacco products. (March 2013). Available at (pdf) http://www.ash.org.uk/APPGillicit2013

For further information please visit cruk.org/tobacco or email publicaffairs@cancer.org.uk