
Australia to have some of "world's toughest health warnings"

Australia will have some of the world's toughest health warnings on tobacco products from April next year, following an agreement at a meeting of Australia's health and police ministers in Melbourne on 7 July.

The ministers agreed that under uniform government regulations, standard warnings would be printed in black type on a white background on the flip top of the pack and would occupy at least 25% of the front of the pack.

The warnings would be frequently rotated and would include:

- Smoking is addictive.
- Smoking kills.
- Smoking causes heart disease.
- Smoking when pregnant harms your baby.
- Your smoking can harm others.
- Smoking causes lung cancer.

The federal minister for health, Senator Graham Richardson, said that the top third of the back of the pack would henceforth be devoted to detailed health information including a national 'quit line' phone number printed in black on a white background.

Other changes include more detailed information on an entire side of the pack about the 'tar', nicotine and carbon monoxide content of the cigarettes, specifically the average yield of these substances and their "potential effect" on health.

The announcement of agreement came in the wake of recent press reports that Richardson was proposing an almost complete back down on an Australia-wide agreement to toughen significantly health warnings on cigarette packs.

Moreover, the government of the state of Victoria had reportedly been considering withdrawing from a national agreement reached last year to introduce strict new health warnings on cigarette packs.

The health minister for the Australian Capital Territory, who introduced legislation requiring new health warnings in June, said

the decision of the Victorian government undermined the national decision and put community health at risk.

He accused the Victorian government of giving in to the tobacco industry, which strenuously opposed the health warnings.

ID cards for smokers

One of the points brought to the meeting by the state government of Victoria was a plan for national smoker identification cards as part of an all-out attack on teenage smoking. The Victorian health minister is keen to see a national approach to stamping out teenage smoking in place by the end of the year.

Tobacco manufacturers disappointed by decision

The tobacco manufacturers in Australia expressed their disappointment at the decision of the ministers, meeting as the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, in a press release issued after the meeting.

"The changes are ill-founded, without precedent and represent the most wide-ranging attack on trade mark commercial freedoms seen in this country."

The release states that recent independent research establishes that 100% of young people aged 15 to 19 are aware of the reported health risks of smoking and that there were consequently no grounds for increasing the size or number of the warnings to be carried on the packs. Moreover, the press release states, "The changes are ill-founded, without precedent and represent the most wide-ranging attack on trade mark commercial freedoms seen in this country." □

Editor's note: Last month, the premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, stated his opposition to a major strengthening of cigarette pack health warnings - see *Infotopics* June 1993 p. 22.

*Cigarette p
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