

WARNING LABELS

Essential Facts

The tobacco package is an essential communication vehicle for the tobacco industry

Tobacco companies depend on package design to build brand recognition and promote sales, especially because advertising for tobacco is becoming increasingly limited in many markets.

- Packaging establishes brand imagery that is often completely opposite to the realities and dangers associated with tobacco product use.² Tobacco companies create brand imagery which promotes ideals of status, wealth, sex appeal, glamour, slimness, manhood, athleticism and health, among many others.
- For the smoker, especially the teenage smoker, the tobacco product pack represents a badge that makes a statement about how he or she wants to be seen by others.³

Pictorial warning labels work!

After Singapore introduced its pictorial warning labels in 2004, a Health Promotion Board survey found that 28% of smokers reported smoking fewer cigarettes because of the warnings; 14% of smokers said that they avoided smoking in front of children; 12% reported avoiding smoking in front of pregnant women; and 8% said that they smoked less at home.⁴

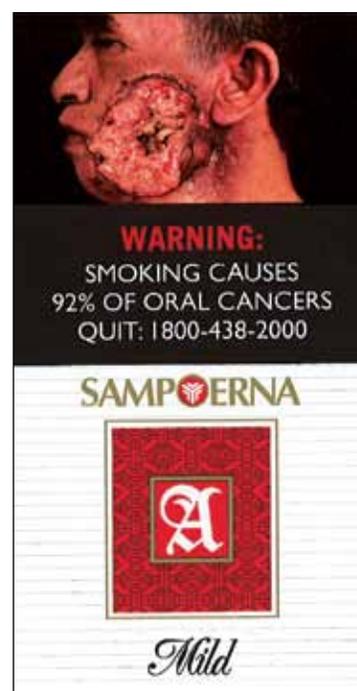
Pictorial warning labels effectively communicate the risks of tobacco use

Control over cigarette packaging is critical to tobacco control efforts. Cigarette packs are effective mediums for broadcasting messages about the harmful impact of tobacco use. Research shows that effective warning labels increase knowledge about risks associated with smoking and can influence future decisions about smoking.^{5,6} Large and graphic warning labels can motivate smokers to quit, discourage nonsmokers from starting,⁷ and keep ex-smokers from starting again.⁸

- 84% of smokers living in Canada, where pictorial warnings are required, saw health warning labels as a source of health information, compared with 47% smokers living in the U.S. where only text labels are required.^{5,9}
- After Brazil introduced new pictorial warnings in 2002, 73% of smokers said they approved of them, 54% said they had changed their opinion about the health consequences of smoking, and 67% said the new warnings made them want to quit.¹⁰
- Following the introduction of Australia's graphic health warning labels, adolescent experimental and established smokers were more likely to think about quitting, and intentions to smoke were lower among those students who discussed the new warning labels.¹¹

“Our final communication vehicle with our smokers is the pack itself. In the absence of any other marketing messages, our packaging... is the sole communicator of our brand essence. Put another way: When you don't have anything else, our packaging is our marketing.”

Executive of the Phillip Morris Company, a transnational tobacco company.¹



Warning label, Singapore

Components of an effective warning label*

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	IMPACT
Location	Place labels on principal display areas (front and back—the largest panels of the package).	Messages in prominent locations are more likely to be noticed.
Size	Cover at least 50% of the package’s principal display areas.	<p>Large messages are more likely to be noticed.</p> <p>Label effectiveness increases with size.</p> <p>Large labels provoke emotional responses and increase motivation to quit.</p>
Pictorials	Illustrate the harmful effects of tobacco use through pictures and/or pictograms.	<p>Photos and strong graphics help smokers visualize the nature of a tobacco-caused disease better than words alone.</p> <p>Pictures are more likely to draw attention and are more likely to be remembered when an individual makes decisions about whether or not to smoke or cut back on smoking.</p> <p>Pictures are especially important in regions with low literacy or where research shows smokers are ignoring text-only warning labels.</p> <p>Pictorial warnings are likely to reach children and adolescents, especially the children of smokers, who are particularly vulnerable.</p>
Color, background and font	<p>Use full color.</p> <p>Contrast colors with the background and the text.</p>	Maximizes visibility and ease of comprehension.
Rotation	Use multiple health warnings and messages on all tobacco products concurrently or rotate them periodically.	Prevents overexposure and the audience becoming desensitized from a single image.
Text	<p>List risk factors by highlighting harmful effects and impact of exposure to tobacco.</p> <p>Include the magnitude of specific risks.</p> <p>Provide cessation advice and local quit line information.</p> <p>Identify the addictive nature of tobacco.</p> <p>Elicit unfavorable emotional association with tobacco use.</p>	<p>Messages highlight the harmful effects of tobacco and provide important public health information to the public which may not be otherwise accessible.</p> <p>Messages eliciting unfavorable emotional associations about tobacco use are more believable and convincing.</p>
Language	Use the country’s principal language(s).	Messages in all principal languages ensures a broader reach.
Source attribution	Label should identify a source, such as a national authority (e.g., Minister of Health) that recommends the health messages.	Depending on the culture, attribution can add credibility to the message.

*The components highlighted in this table are best practices derived from WHO’s FCTC Article 11 Guidelines and The Tobacco Labelling & Packaging Toolkit produced by the Tobacco Labelling Resource Centre.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) requires effective health warning labels¹²

The FCTC, the world's first global public health treaty, establishes a policy framework for reducing the devastating health and economic impacts of tobacco. Article 11 of the FCTC requires Parties to implement effective measures to warn against the harmful impact of tobacco use on all tobacco product packaging within three years after ratification. Implementation of a pictorial warning label policy presents no financial cost to governments; fees are borne by tobacco companies.



Warning label, Belgium

Global progress on the implementation of warning label¹³

Governments have made extraordinary progress in improving tobacco warning labels by implementing measures as outlined by the WHO FCTC.

As of December 2010, more than 30 countries/jurisdictions have implemented graphic warning labels on tobacco packages that are a minimum of 30% of the overall package. For a more updated list of countries and details on these countries, go to http://tobaccofreecenter.org/files/pdfs/en/WL_examples_en.pdf.



Warning label, Thailand

Key messages

- The tobacco package is an essential communication vehicle for the tobacco industry; tobacco companies depend on tobacco package design to build brand recognition and promote sales.^{2,3}
- Pictorial health warning labels communicate the risks of tobacco use. Effective warning labels increase knowledge about risks associated with smoking and can decrease intentions to smoke among adolescents,¹¹ persuade smokers to quit,^{6,14} and keep ex-smokers from starting again.
- Graphic warning labels have a greater impact than text-only labels and can be recognized by low-literacy audiences and children — two vulnerable population groups.^{5,9}
- Effective warning labels are large, clear, rotating, cover at least 50% of the total tobacco pack and consist of both text and graphic images.¹²
- Parties to the FCTC are required to implement effective measures to warn against the harmful impact of tobacco use on all tobacco product packaging within three years of ratification.¹²



Warning label, New Zealand

References

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