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Smoke-Free Nova Scotia's Position on Plain packaging

A cigarette package serves as a marketing vehicle for the tobacco industry. There are many brand elements on a cigarette package including colors, descriptors, and product shape. Smokers perceive light color shades as less harmful alternatives. Some descriptors such as "Sun Ripened Tobacco" and "No additives" may influence smokers and increase product appeal. Finally, product shape is manipulated to connect with different demographics such as slimmer packs which are disproportionately smoked by females because it connects with their body image preferences. Health warnings on cigarette packages are important to reduce smoking. The more diluted the brand elements, the stronger the focus of smokers on the health warnings.

Plain packaging refers to the standardization of the color, font, background and shape of a package. Plain packaging is important because it has the tendency to neutralize brand elements and increase the attention to warnings.

Overall, there is strong evidence-base to recommend plain packaging, including the following:

- It eliminates brand imagery (attractive brand fonts, background colors, font colors, logos, and branding images) which increases warning recognition¹ and attention towards warnings amongst youth and adult non-smokers and occasional smokers^{2,3}.
- It decreases positive perceptions about the packages (e.g. its physical appeal) and increases negative feelings towards smoking (e.g. fear) in both adults and youth^{4,6}.
- It decreases the willingness of smokers to pay for cigarettes in comparison to branded counterparts⁷.
- It increases calls to Quitlines and increases quit rates^{5,8}.

Based on the evidence and best practices, Smoke-Free Nova Scotia recommends the following:

1. Use slide and shell format only

Flip flop formats distort the health warnings when the pack is opened and thus reduce warning effectiveness. Smokers perceive cigarettes from slide and shell packages as tasting worse and more harmful relative to cigarettes housed in flip flop format packages⁹.

2. Prohibit demographic-specific package shape

Some packs such as the slim formats attract females and lead to a disproportionate rate of smoking for specific brands among women as compared to men⁵.

3. Define warning surface restrictions

If the size of the warnings within the designated surface area is not specified, small warnings might be placed within those areas which reduces their visibility and thus potential effectiveness¹.



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4. Prohibit secondary packages

Inside some primary packages is a secondary package that lacks any type of warnings and in fact contains promotional messages to increase product appeal. These secondary packages undermine the purpose of including warnings on cigarette packages¹⁰.

5. Maintain warning novelty

It is important to change the circulated warnings to prevent de-sensitization of the public to the warnings⁵.

For further information:

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