

**SMOKEFREE COALITION SAYS NEW TOBACCO HEALTH WARNINGS
ONLY FIRST STEP**

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The Smokefree Coalition is welcoming this morning's announcement by Associate Minister of Health Damien O'Connor that graphic warnings will appear on all cigarette packets from 2008, but says more needs to be done.

"It's a good start," says Coalition Director Mark Peck. "However, we're disappointed the warnings won't be bigger."

The Coalition is promising to keep the pressure on the Government to further regulate the appearance, sale and marketing of tobacco products.

"We look forward to the day when tobacco product display is prohibited in New Zealand, and all tobacco is sold in plain packaging containing only health warnings," Mark Peck said.

The new warnings will comprise graphic images of the kinds of damage smoking can cause, and must cover 30 percent of the front of every cigarette packet and 90 percent of the back.

Mr Peck says the Coalition wanted health warnings to cover 60 percent of the front and 100 percent of the back.

"We know from Canadian research that large pictorial health warnings are an important way of informing smokers about the health effects of smoking. If we want to reduce the annual 5,000 smoking-related deaths in New Zealand, the logical thing is to make warnings larger.

"We need to send the clearest message possible that smoking leads to disease, and early death."

The Smokefree Coalition believes the grace-period of 12 months for manufacturers is too long, giving the tobacco industry ample opportunity to stockpile packs without graphic warnings. These can still be sold for six months after the restrictions come into force on 27 February 2008.

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