

Graphic tobacco warnings pack a punch

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Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) NZ, The Smokefree Coalition, The Cancer Society of New Zealand, Te Reo Marama and The Quit Group

Regulations effective from today will see graphic pictorial health warnings appear on all tobacco sold in New Zealand. The large graphic images on the front and back of cigarette packs feature images of rotting gums and teeth, mouth cancer and gangrenous feet.

There will be 14 different images introduced. The first seven warnings will appear on cigarette packets in both English and Te Reo Māori in year one, with the remaining seven to be introduced the following year and there after they will be rotated annually.

Tobacco control groups are supportive of the new labelling, but caution that there is still a long way to go in battling the deadly tobacco epidemic.

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Director, Ben Youdan says, "This is a step in the right direction. Bigger, bolder warnings do get results. 31 percent of former smokers who have been exposed to graphic warnings have said the labels influenced them to quit.

"There is much more that needs to be done and people needn't see this as the final piece in smoking prevention."

Shane Bradbrook, Director of Te Reo Marama is pleased that warnings will be carried in both English and Te Reo Maori.

"Previous warnings translated the main campaign phrases, but now packs will have specific details too."

Mark Peck, Director of the Smokefree Coalition says, "From the international evidence that I've seen large warnings on the front and back of cigarette packets are very effective ways to alter smoking behaviour, they have the most impact."

The Cancer Society has praised the Government for introducing new graphic health warnings which they say will improve smoker's awareness of the negative health effects of smoking.

"Graphic health warnings are an important step forward and provide a far more effective method of communicating health messages than text alone," says Belinda Hughes, Tobacco Control Advisor for the Cancer Society.

The Cancer Society would also like to see the new graphic health warnings made larger and for the Government to consider requiring plain packaging for the rest of the pack.

"There really is no justification for allowing tobacco companies to continue to use marketing devices like packaging to promote smoking," concludes Ms Hughes.

The move to pictorial warnings follows the lead of several countries around the world, including Australia, Brazil, Thailand and Canada who have already implemented pictorial health warnings.

Helen Glasgow, Executive Director, The Quit Group expects an increase in the number of quit attempts as a direct result of the graphic warnings on tobacco products.

“Calls to quit smoking services in Australia increased by 30 percent when graphic warnings came into force and if overseas experience is anything to go by, then graphic warnings will certainly encourage New Zealanders to try to quit.”

The international treaty, Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) which the New Zealand Government ratified in January 2004 laid the groundwork for the introduction of these sets of warnings.

Article 11 of the Framework requires the size of health warnings to be not less than 30 percent (and ideally to be 50 percent or more) of the principal display areas of tobacco packaging. The previous text warnings covered slightly less than 30 percent.

The new regulations will see 30 percent of the front and 90 percent of the back of cigarette packets covered by health warnings. Once the new labelling requirements come into force, retailers will have to sell existing cigarettes containing the old warnings by 31 August.